



Memorable characters in illustrated children's literature



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1

Introduction

We probably all know them, the great ones – the most beloved children’s book characters. These are the memorable characters that we never have let go – that we have been able to remember clearly through all the clutter and fogginess of childhood memories. We love to reminiscence about them and these characters are the ones we will, or have, enthusiastically introduced to our own children. Enthusiastic, perhaps because of the possibility of yet again meeting and rejoicing in the return of long lost friends.

In my home country Sweden, there are quite many of these memorable and dearly loved characters. Some of the children’s book characters are Swedish, some are imported. Many figures are the same ones that the whole of Scandinavia, and beyond, cherish. Like, for example, the author Astrid Lindgren’s character Pippi Långstrump¹, the world’s strongest girl, who has been amusing millions of small children, since the first book was published in 1945 (Gaare and Sjaastad, 2002). Then there is of course Emil i Lönneberga, the mischievous but kind hearted boy, a figure also created by Astrid Lindgren in 1963. And also, Gunilla Bergström’s character Alfons Åberg, a seven-year-old boy, who most likely has the world’s kindest father. And moreover the gentle and naive Mumin troll together with the tiny temperamental lilla My created by Tove Jansson.

Without a doubt there are many successful, beloved and popular children’s book characters. At the same time, there are many more characters that are easily forgotten, that will never make a mark in anyone’s memory. The question arises, what are the elements that actually make a children’s book character memorable? What are the qualities that these characters have, that so many others seem to lack?

¹ For the sake of consistency and to avoid any mistakes in translation, I will refer to all characters with their original names.

The main purpose of this thesis is to try to discuss and answer these questions. As a basis for discussion and analysis, I have chosen to present, analyse and compare two children’s book characters that I consider distinctively memorable. The characters chosen for this purpose are Astrid Lindgren’s Pippi Långstrump and Tove Jansson’s Knyttet². These two characters, that are seemingly very different, have more in common than one might expect.

I became interested in this topic when I attempted to do an illustrated children’s book of my own. In this project I became stuck with the story’s characters, never getting them right. I was so set on the idea of an adventure story, that I had forgotten about the characters. And initially they were not too important to me – an attitude in tune with an old principle in children’s books, that characters are subordinate to the plot (Nikolajeva, 2005). Through this project I understood that characters should not be neglected. This in turn made me want to advocate the importance of characterisation in storytelling.

The two major concepts that this thesis is dealing with, are characters and characterisations in illustrated children’s books. Characters can be defined as agents in a story that are carrying out actions, and characterisation as the artistic manoeuvres, that writers use to create and reveal characters in a narrative (Nikolajeva, 2005). Although the concept of characterisation will in this thesis encompass not only the written narrative, but also the manner in which characters are presented in illustrations.

It is for the reason of making the study as comprehensive as possible, that I have decided to discuss characters and characterisation in both text and pictures. I believe that both written and visual characterisation is useful for graphic designers who work with making illustrations. To know more about the means of written characterisation can be valuable. For example, it could allow for a more close-knit collaboration, where text and image come together in the presentation of a character.

² In the original text, “Vem ska trösta knyttet?”, knyttet is always written with a lowercase k. However, for the purpose of clarity, I have written the name with a capital K.

Outline of the thesis

The thesis first introduces the research subject and previous research. This is followed by the explanation of choosing Pippi and Knyttet, and a format, genre and motif/theme categorisation of their respective stories. Following this is the presentation and comparative analysis of Pippi and Knyttet. Last is the conclusion, in which the research question is discussed and answered.

Included in the end is an appendix where I present the first steps of producing my own children’s book. Submitted here is the process of developing a protagonist character for a picture book; the ideas and thoughts behind the character, the story’s synopsis and storyboard, sketches and five of the illustrations for the planned picture book.

Thesis objective

In this thesis I am interested in finding out the aspects that make up unforgettable written and visual characterisation in children's books. My hypothesis is, that the answer lies somehow in the way that the character's personalities are expressed. Therefore this thesis concentrates on how the psychological features of characters are conveyed. This can be defined as a mimetic study and analysis.

According to Nikolajeva, the mimetic concept goes all the way back to Aristotle, who used the word *mimesis*, meaning imitation or reflection, to signify the relationship of literature to reality (Nikolajeva, 2005). And, she states, that the objective of the mimetic approach is to "... investigate exactly how reality is depicted in a concrete text, or in the oeuvre of a particular writer, or in a specific genre, or during a specific epoch" (Nikolajeva, 2005).

When it comes to a mimetic approach to characters, Nikolajeva writes, that the focus of interest is "... what they are and how they relate to real people as we know them from the real world" (Nikolajeva, 2005). She continues, that from the mimetic standpoint one can, for example, see characters from a psychological perspective, or as bearers of ideas/beliefs, or as role models etc. (Nikolajeva, 2005). In this thesis, the mimetic approach lies in treating and viewing characters from a psychological point of view.

The chosen approach leads us into the plan to conduct this research. Since I aim to find out and understand more about what memorable character portrayals are composed of, I have decided to take a closer look at children's book characters, that have been proven popular and memorable through time. As mentioned, the characters chosen for study are Tove Jansson's *Knyttet* and Astrid Lindgren's *Pippi Långstrump*. I have decided to analyse these two characters individually, but also to compare them, to see if there exists any commonalities in their depiction. This may help to understand what makes a children's book character memorable.

The research question that this thesis addresses is: What makes a children's book character memorable?

In the pages that follow, it will be demonstrated that memorable children's book characters share common characteristics – in the manner that the characters are psychologically portrayed, both in the textual and visual representation. It will be shown that the two characters presented in this thesis are both depicted in a psychologically nuanced and profound way. Moreover, the character description of both can be called multidimensional and coherent, which makes them appear both credible and human. This allows the reader to understand and empathise with them – the characters in turn become real, significant and memorable to the reader. Accordingly, this thesis argues the importance of depicting multidimensional, coherent characters in children's books.

Previous research

As a medium, children's literature has quite possibly been more thoroughly studied than any other medium (McCabe et al. 2011). However, curiously enough, there is very little research about characterisation in children's literature. The topic does not seem to mesmerise researchers of children's literature. Perhaps, it is because of the traditional approach towards characters' importance? Or is the topic too basic to get any attention? According to Nikolajeva, "Characters and characterizations are such an obvious part of fiction, that they are very seldom discussed in critical works" (Nikolajeva, 2001).

Within the scarce current research and critical discussion concerning children's book characters, the topic of representation seems to be in focus. The discussion revolves around which social groups are being neglected or stereotyped in their representation in children's books. Examples are, the neglect or the negative stereotyping of female, deaf and GLBTQ characters in children's literature (see Golos et al. 2011, Hamilton et al. 2006, Epstein, 2012, McCabe et al. 2011).

Certainly the topic of character representation is significant in children's literature, for the purpose of e.g. empathy, belonging and identification. Children's literature should of course strive to mirror, include and depict every group possible, as well as strive to be a force against stereotyping.

Nevertheless, I wonder if there is too much focus on counting who is represented and who is not. My concern is that the characters of children's books, as a group themselves, are being neglected by the critics of children's literature. That typecasting and filling quota is more important than how psychologically nuanced and fully developed any given character is in a children's book. Is group representation more essential in children's books than the character's psychological depth and/or growth? Can children only identify with their exact peers? Can a boy only identify with a boy protagonist? I would argue that it is possible to identify and sympathise with any character, if that character is well described and explained.

According to Nikolajeva, literary characters can have the advantage of being more transparent than any real people can. She writes, that ultimately we can only know ourselves intrinsically, everybody else we are bound to only have extrinsic knowledge of, they are opaque. But one of the marvellous aspects of literary characters is, that they can be presented as more or less completely transparent – their inner life can be revealed to us in ways a real person's inner life never can (Nikolajeva, 2001).

In this way, we can truly get to know literary characters and their inner lives. We can get to know them better than we know our peers. That leaves, in my opinion, great potential for deeper psychological characterisation in the realm of children's books. Would that not mean that writers, as well as illustrators of children's books, have the opportunity to aid and influence the development of children's understanding of human nature?

Of course critics might argue, that psychological characterisation is not suitable for all cases of literature for children. Especially, when it comes to characters in picture books for small children. Firstly, one could argue that the format of picture books does not allow for any deeper characterisation – usually very little and simple text and more focus on pictures. Secondly, it has been claimed that smaller children do not possess the ability to understand deeper characterisation. Their cognitive abilities are not yet developed enough to make sense of complex characters (Nikolajeva, 2001).

Bruno Bettelheim – the American psychologist and author of the influential *The Uses of Enchantment* (1979) – for instance, stated that characters need to basically be one-dimensional – all good or all bad (Bettelheim, 1979). According to Bettelheim, a small child (aged 3–6 years as I understand) psychologically experiences the world as either full of joy or as pure hell. There is no in-between to speak of – a child feels either like the brightest or the absolute dullest. Subsequently, characters should be presented in the same way – the brightest or the dullest, all virtuous or all evil. Characters should be introduced in this manner for the child to be able to mentally grasp characters actions and reactions without difficulty (Bettelheim, 1979).

Consequently, the claims that children are not able to understand complex characters, has considerably slowed down the emergence of psychologically deeper characterisation in children's literature (Nikolajeva, 2001). Unfortunately so, in my opinion. However, a character possessing too many conflicting or complex personality traits surely must confuse a child (or a grown-up for that matter). It is crucial that protagonists, or antagonists for that matter,

are believable in order for the readers to grasp their actions and reactions (Giorgis et al. 2000).

Furthermore, a child's age, naturally, needs to be taken into consideration as well. Around the age of four, according to Viveka Ljungström, books can truly start to become an asset for children's understanding of the world, themselves, love, melancholy and life itself (Ljungström, 2006). Taking this into account, then perhaps around four is good age for introducing books with a more nuanced characterisation. However, that does not mean that characters intended for very small children could not possess unique and nuanced qualities, for instance in the emotional expressions of the illustrations.

Even though I claimed that little research has been done on characters and characterisation in children's literature, there are some researchers that have taken an interest in the topic. For example, the already above quoted, researcher and professor of comparative literature, Maria Nikolajeva, who has written comprehensively about characterisation in children's literature. Nikolajeva is one of the researchers whose work I have used extensively as supporting research and reference material. The researchers who have focused on either of the two characters, Knyttet or Pippi, are: The philosophers, Jørgen Gaare and Øystein Sjaastad, who have made a reflective philosophical and psychological analysis of Pippi in their book, *Pippi and Sokrates* (2002). And Charlotta Ödman who has written insightfully in her book, *Snälla vilda barn* (2007), about Pippi and the other children characters in Astrid Lindgren's many stories. And furthermore, the children's book researchers Lena Kåreland and Barbro Werkmäster, who have written an in-depth analysis, *Livsvandring i tre akter* (1994), about the three picture books made by Tove Jansson, *Hur gick det sen?* (1952), *Vem ska trösta knyttet?* (1960), and *Den farliga resan* (1977). Other researchers that should be mentioned are Ulla Lundqvist and Vivi Edström who have written comprehensively about Pippi. And, in addition, Boel Westin, who has written thoughtfully about Knyttet.

The choice of characters

The process of selecting characters for this study has not been altogether easy. For example, many characters from my original list of “memorable characters”, that would have been possible subjects for study, fell out because of not finding enough research and reference material. Other characters could surely be called memorable enough, but they still had qualities that seem to generically described for the purpose of this study. For example the character Winnie the Pooh, and other characters in the story, appear in my opinion quite fable-like. Meaning, that they have qualities that we associate to specific animals. For example, owls are intelligent, snakes are deceptive and foxes cunning, etc. In the case of *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926), the bear is kind and slow-witted, the owl is the intelligent mentor, etc. Also, since one can find memorable characters in all genres or forms of illustrated literature for children, an effort to limit the study excluded many characters. I decided to concentrate the study and analysis on children's fiction, like illustrated novels and picture books. Which then excluded characters from, for example, historical or biographical literature for children. It also excluded characters from more mass produced illustrated literature for children, like comics.

The choice in the end fell on the characters Pippi Långstrump and Knyttet. First of all, because I think they both are distinctively memorable characters. Both are famous and celebrated children's book characters. According to Lena Kåreland, the books about Pippi have been translated to around seventy different languages, and she is a well-known character in China, as well as in Africa (Kåreland, 2013). The picture book about Knyttet, *Vem ska trösta knyttet?* (1960), is one of Tove Jansson's most beloved stories, and it has been both filmed and presented on stage (Westin, 2007). And among the vast character array of Tove Jansson's mumin characters he truly stands tall. Another reason, why they deserve to be called memorable, is the fact that they both have survived the test of time. The first book about Pippi, *Pippi Långstrump*, was published already in 1945, almost seventy years ago. And the story about Knyttet is also over fifty

years old. A long time has passed since they first were published, but their popularity seems ongoing.

Another reason for choosing Pippi and Knyttet, is the simple fact that they seem to represent two very different types of characters placed into two very different settings. Knyttet is depicted as a fantasy figure, a small troll, who is living in a fantasyland, while Pippi is depicted as a real child (although with superhuman qualities), living in a small town in a realistic world. Furthermore, their personalities are seemingly worlds apart from each other. The character Pippi is the world's strongest girl, confident, independent and, in the words of Gaare and Sjaastad, "Pippi är ingen medelmåtta. Hon är en hjältinna och en jätte med övermänskliga krafter, förklädd till en finlemmad liten flickunge", "*Pippi is no mediocrity. She is a heroine and a giant, disguised as small-boned little girl*" (Gaare and Sjaastad, 2002).³ While, on the other hand, the character Knyttet is weak, fearful and extremely shy – although, a sort of hero in his own right.

A third reason for choosing these two examples, is the fact that the book about Knyttet is a picture book, while the three books presented here about Pippi are text-based stories with accompanying illustrations. Since I decided early on to discuss both written and visual characterisation, I believe, that Pippi's and Knyttet's different proportion of text and image will allow good individual analysis and comparison of the two means of narrative.

Also, instead of having several characters to study, I chose only two to have a more systematic and comprehensive comparison and analysis. As mentioned above the characters seem conceptually different and so appear their respective stories. For example, they can be seen to represent different formats, genres and themes within the children's book realm. Because of these differences, I believe that the stories of Pippi and Knyttet provide good material for this thesis.

³ All Swedish quotes from researchers and phrases from the two children's books presented here have been translated by me. So, any mistakes in translation are mine.

Categorising Pippi and Knyttet

Narrative format

It is actually not particularly easy to categorise illustrated books for children. How does one define a picture book for instance? Is it about quantitative number of images in a book or is it about the relationship between text and images? Ulla Rhedin brings up in her dissertation, *Bilderboken, på väg mot en teori* (1992), several points of view of defining the concept of picture books and other illustrated books for children. For example, she mentions Torben Gregersen's category scheme from 1974 (Rhedin, 1992). In the scheme Greger-sen separates between pointing-books (pekböcker), picture-stories (bildhis-torier), picture books (bilderböcker) and illustrated children's books (illus-trerade småbarnsböcker) on the basis of quantitative emphasis on either text or images (Gregersen, 1974, as referred to by Rhedin, 1992).

Another point of view that Ulla Rhedin brings up, is to have the focus of definition on the picture/text relationship's more dynamic and structural aspects. For example, to expect in a picture book such a connection between the text and image, that it would be an inseparable unity (Rhedin, 1992). Rhedin mentions Lena Fridell's essay, where she uses four categories as a basis for structuring the dynamics of text and image; 1: Books that only con-tains pictures; 2: Books where text is secondary to pictures; 3: Books where text and pictures have been created simultaneously; 4: Books where pictures are secondary to text (*Bilden i barnboken*, Fridell, 1977).⁴

Furthermore, Ulla Rhedin herself suggests in her dissertation another classification system of three categories; the epic or illustrated book, the ex-panding picture book and the genuine picture book (Rhedin, 1992). Which

⁴ I think that it is interesting to note that Fridell places in the fourth category both books, where pictures and text appear as a unity, and books where the pictures are mostly decorative (*Bilden i barnboken*, Fridell, 1977).

in turn has been criticised by Maria Nikolajeva to, for example, not being able to handle the wide spectrum of word/picture relationships (Nikolajeva, 2000).

So, there seems to be plenty of different views and ideas on the topic of classification concerning illustrated books for children. In order to simplify and keep in mind that the main concern of this thesis is about characterisation – and the different artistic means of text, and pictures in presenting characters – a more general classification has to suffice.⁵ For this purpose Perry Nodelman gives a useful definition of picture books as, “ ... books intended for young children which communicate information or tell stories through a series of many pictures combined with relatively slight texts or no texts at all ...” (Nodelman, 1988). Which, in my interpretation, means that in picture books the emphasis mainly rests on images, the text is subordinate, but can work together, enhance or be absent from the stories. By contrast illustrated children's books would then be seen as as books where the emphasis rests on the text, and the accompanying pictures can either work together with or enhance the text. Thus, the definitions used here for Pippi's and Knyttet's stories, will be that of an illustrated children's book and a picture book, with the emphasis on text versus emphasis on pictures.

Genre

According to Nikolajeva, a clear explanation of how to define a genre is impossible to give (Nikolajeva, 2005). She writes, that among scholars, there is no consensus on how to define a genre or what genres exist. According to her, there is even less agreement when it comes to genres of children's literature. Though, simply put, one can explain genres as categories that literary texts are sorted into, according to specific criteria (Nikolajeva, 2005). Simple enough, one might think, although the confusion and difficulties with the genre concept becomes evident when attempting to determine which specific genres the Pippi trilogy and *Vem ska trösta knyttet?* belong to.

For example, a quick genre definition of *Vem ska trösta knyttet?* could be that it is fantasy story, since the setting is a fantasy world (the same world as in the

⁵ Researching specifically the dynamics of how picture and text can work together (or not) in disclosing aspects of characters, is such an interesting topic, and would be such a huge undertaking, that it would need its own thesis.

Mumin books). Although, the fact that it is played out in a pure fantasy world, is actually what would be seen as separating it from the fantasy genre. Since, according to Lena Kåreland, in fantasy a usual and significant feature is, that it plays out in two parallel worlds – the real world and a fantasy world (Kåreland, 2001). In *Vem ska trösta knyttet?* there is no realistic world, all is played out in a fantasy world.

Perhaps the story would be better placed in the genre of fairy tales? According to Kåreland, fairy tales have a lot in common with the fantasy genre, with the exception of the above mentioned feature of parallel worlds, which fairy tales lack (Kåreland, 2001). The story about Knyttet does seem to have plenty of fairy tale connections. Nikolajeva states that “... on the whole we recognise fairy tales on the basis of their recurrent formulas (such as “lived happily ever after”), as well as their set of characters and events” (Nikolajeva, 2005). She also brings up some of the common features of fairy tales, such as the opening sentence “Once upon a time”, and that magic often is a part of the story, and, furthermore, that they always have a moral and happy ending (Nikolajeva, 2005). Many of these signposts are to be found in *Vem ska trösta knyttet?*, for example the classic opening and ending phrases together with the happy ending.

However, it seems wrong to bluntly categorise the story about Knyttet as a fairy tale for at least two reasons. Firstly, *Vem ska trösta knyttet?* seems more like a parodic take on a classic fairy tale than a genuine one, since it, for example, plays with the ideal of a hero. Secondly, the main character in the story appears more dramatically charged – psychologically and emotionally – than in most fairy tales. Characters in classic fairy tales are basically depicted as one-dimensional and without emotional weaknesses (Nikolajeva, 2001). This is a characterisation mould that does not encompass the figure Knyttet. These two notions will be discussed more later.

Then again, the stories that are considered as modern fairy tales, appear quite different from the traditional ones. For example, they seem to a higher degree depict existential issues and have heroes expressing emotions. Lena Kåreland brings up Astrid Lindgren as an example of a modern fairy tale writer, that has with her fairy tale collections, *Nils Karlsson-Pyssling* (1949) and *Sunnanäng* (1959), broken many of the old conventions. By, for example, giving the stories an anchorage in time and space (Kåreland, 2001). Moreover, Vivi Edström describes *Nils Karlsson-Pyssling* as being about the difficulty of being human, and *Sunnanäng* as being stories that depict the inner chaos, that the older fairy tale tradition rarely dared to show (Edström, 1997). Kåreland also

brings up Tove Jansson as modern fairy tale writer, that has with her Mumin stories created a highly personal and unique fairy tale world (Kåreland, 2001). So, taking the above into consideration, *Vem ska trösta knyttet?* could be classified into the modern fairy tale -genre, especially considering that the Mumin stories have been discussed in that context.

Similarly, the Pippi trilogy is not easy to categorise into a specific genre. The trilogy seems to have connotations with several different genres. For example, with satire, because of the many confrontational encounters with society and its rules, that Pippi refuses to succumb to. Vivi Edström writes, that the fact that Pippi can not handle herself in social circumstances creates many festive scenes, although the point is, that it is not Pippi that is ridiculed – it is our habits that are laughed about (Edström, 2004).

On the other hand, Pippi has fantastical abilities – her supernatural strenght – which could place her story into the fantasy genre. Nikolajeva writes that, “One element that we immediately recognize as characteristic of the fantasy genre is the presence of magic, or any other form of the supernatural, in an otherwise realistic world. This presence may be manifest in the form of magical beings, objects, or events; it may be unfolded into a whole universe or reduced to just one tiny element of magic” (Nikolajeva, 2005). Within these principals, Pippi herself could be seen as the element of magic, since the magic required in fantasy can be one element of the supernatural.⁶ Or, in fact, she could be seen as a personification of a fantastical world, which her friends Tommy and Annika visit from the real world.

The third possible genre for Pippi is adventure or even its subgenre, the robinsonade, which originates from Daniel Dafoe's, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Books within this category depict travels, adventure and how to manage on one's own (Kåreland, 2001). Several of the episodes in the Pippi books could be called robinsonades, and in a sense Pippi's whole life situation resembles an adventure of how one manages alone.

Then there is the genre of nonsense. According to Ulla Lundqvist, many researchers have pointed out, that the Pippi books have similarities with

⁶ Interesting to note is, that even if Knyttet is a fantasy figure living in a fantasy world, and Pippi is a real child living in the real world, the Pippi stories, and Pippi herself, could be considered more fantastical, because of her supernatural features. In Knyttet's story there is actually nothing really magical happening at all, and Knyttet himself certainly does not embody any supernatural qualities.

British nonsense literature, such as Lewis Carroll's, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) (Lundqvist, 1979). Lundqvist writes that it is Pippi's person – her framing, habits, the way she speaks, etc. – that makes up an example of topos, that can be claimed to fill the criteria of nonsense literature. Although, she continues that Pippi Långstrump, like other ground breaking and original literary works, cannot be submitted into a definite genre (Lundqvist, 1979).

Even though Lundqvist seems to believe that there are enough nonsense elements in the Pippi books to categorise them as such, she still prefers the genre term surreal-comical (since Lundqvist does not see nonsense as a true genre). At the same time, Lundqvist states that a genre categorisation like this, is an assertion that the Pippi books contain so much new, that one would have to expand the definition of the genre to fit the Pippi books (Lundqvist, 1979).

I agree with Lundqvist, that it is not perhaps possible to categorise the Pippi books into any specific genre, and the same goes for Knyttet's story – the genre limits seem too narrow. However, I do believe that the genre of surreal-comical seems to fit the Pippi stories best, since it embraces the major aspects of the work. According to Lundqvist the most defining feature is the comical language (Lundqvist, 1979) – and I agree. The stories contain surreal elements – in the way Pippi plays with language and tells the craziest, most senseless stories – that join or interrelate with many types of comedy. Like Lundqvist describes, “... från enkel slapstick till ganska besk satir”, “...*from simple slapstick to quite bitter satire*” (Lundqvist, 1979).

Motifs and Themes

Nikolajeva writes that, a motif is a textual element, like an event, character or object, that is to be found in many literary works. Some of her examples for motifs are friendship, quest, love, struggle and revenge (Nikolajeva, 2005). Furthermore, Nikolajeva distinguishes between primary (leading) and secondary (subsidiary) motifs, where the primary motif can also be defined as the book's theme, since it is the most convincing claim (Nikolajeva, 2005).

The motif of quest is the most common in children's literature, according to Nikolajeva, “... especially if we treat it broadly, not limiting the search for objects or persons, but also including the quest for identity” (Nikolajeva, 2005). Another common motif, according to Nikolajeva, is journey, and supplementary motif – to both quest and journey – is, for example, running away or escaping (Nikolajeva, 2005).

Almost all the above mentioned motifs can be found in *Vem ska trösta knyttet?* The story starts with Knyttet fleeing or escaping his miserable lonely life situation, and then ending up on a literal journey, as well as on a journey of inner development, or growth. There also appears to be several quest motifs in the story. For example, the quests to be seen, to belong, to find love, to find identity and to find a life purpose. The theme of the story is then perhaps debatable since there are so many motifs. However, I believe that most of them can be embraced by the main theme of a quest out of loneliness into companionship and belonging.

The motifs in the Pippi trilogy are, for example, freedom, friendship, play and integrity – the major motif surely being freedom. Freedom is what many researchers, for example Lundqvist, believe that the character Pippi personifies (Lundqvist, 1979). In one sense the theme of freedom is connected with the motif of integrity. This is because the fight for integrity appears to be a major part in the story: in all the episodes where Pippi is confronted with the adults' world's attempt to "help" or "adjust" her.

However, freedom is also intimately linked with the motif of play. Lundqvist brings up Ellen Buttenschøn's view that Pippi embodies a freedom, which very goal is a world of unrestricted play (Lundqvist, 1979): "At give børnene adgang til en tilværelse midt i hverdagen, hvor der leges og "findes på" fra morgen til aften, en fantasiens og legens ønskedrømmetilværelse, er Pippi Langstrømpe-bøgernes mest dominerende ærinde", "*To give children access to an existence in the middle of everyday life, where there is play and "make-believe" from morning to evening, a fantasy and play dream-existence, is the Pippi Långstrump books most dominating errand*" (Buttenschøn, 1975, as quoted in Lundqvist, 1979). I agree, the major goal for the freedom in the Pippi books seems to be play, and in that sense there is two interrelated main motifs. In conclusion, the theme of the Pippi books could perhaps be freedom and play – or freedom of play.



Pippi Långstrump



Picture 1: Astrid Lindgren's drawing of Pippi, from *Kvällsdoppet i Katthult* (p. 70, 2004).

The narrative of Pippi started one day in 1941, when Astrid Lindgren's young daughter was lying sick in bed and asked her mother if she could tell a story about Pippi Långstrump (Lundqvist, 1979). Resolutely, her mother started making up stories about a red haired girl that was more remarkable than anyone else (Hagerfors, 2002). During the following years, the stories kept amusing Astrid Lindgren's own family, but also children in her surrounding (Edström, 2004). Then, in the winter of 1944, Astrid Lindgren slipped and twisted her ankle so badly that she had to keep immobile for several weeks, and to save herself from boredom by writing down the stories about Pippi Långstrump (Edström, 2004).

The first manuscript was refused by the publishing house, though (Lundqvist, 1979). One of the problems with the first script seemed to concern some of the original Pippi's character traits. Pippi was then even more strikingly cheeky and rebellious than in the published version, according to Gaare and Sjaastad (Gaare and Sjaastad, 2002). Vivi Edström calls the original character, really mean – reminding more of a gnome than a child (Edström, 2004). A new script was made with a slightly revised Pippi, still rebellious but more warm and good at heart (Hagerfors, 2002). The first book, *Pippi Långstrump*, was published in 1945, and it was an instant hit. The first reviews were positive – even hinting that this was the book everyone had been waiting for – and there was a rush to the bookstores that Christmas (Ödman, 2007). However, soon enough angry voices started protesting against Pippi. She was perceived as something uncomfortable. According to Gaare and Sjaastad, her unnatural behaviour and complete lack of respect when it came to authorities, outraged just precisely the authorities, within the school system and the cultural society (Gaare and Sjaastad, 2002).

Today, time has perhaps eventually caught up with the character Pippi's ability to outrage any authorities. Gaare and Sjaastad write, that it would seem almost comical, if she now would stir up any emotions when it comes to

morality, for example (Gaare and Sjaastad, 2002). However, neither critique or time has effected Pippi's popularity to any appreciable extent. Pippi Långstrump is still one of Sweden's most popular and beloved children's book characters (Edström, 2004). As Gaare and Sjaastad state, Pippi is in no need of an introduction – everybody knows and can immediately envision her (Gaare and Sjaastad, 2002).

The Pippi Långstrump stories

In the very beginning of the first Pippi book, *Pippi Långstrump* (1945), the frame of the story is set. The reader gets to know that in the outskirts of a small, small town, there is an old run down garden. In that garden there is an old house and in the old house there lives a small girl. The girl is nine years old and is living there all by herself. She has come alone from the big oceans and moved into the house, that her father once bought to have as a place to settle in when he would get tired of life at sea. The father is now missing at sea, and the girl's mother died when she was only a baby. However, she does not really mind being without parents. Being alone means, for example, that no one can tell her to go to bed in the middle of having the most fun, or force her to eat fish-liver oil when she rather wants candy. Gaare and Sjaastad write that, with this information the reader gets a full presentation of the story's premise, the place, the main character, the absence of parents and the freedom (Gaare and Sjaastad, 2002).

In the rest of the first book, the story revolves around Pippi and her friends' life and play, but depicts also her victorious collisions with the adult world of the small town, according to Gaare and Sjaastad (Gaare and Sjaastad, 2002). They write that the character Pippi “... valsar runt med skollärare och mobbare, poliser och inbrottstjuvar, societetsfruar och vildjur – alltid med samma orädda överlägsenhet och en rapp replik på tungan”, “... *dances around with schoolteachers and bullies, police and burglars, society wives and wild animals – always with the same fearless superiority and with a quick remark at hand*” (Gaare and Sjaastad, 2002).

The overall composition of all three books is based on small episodes, rather than a continuous story plot. In the first book the episodes include, for example, Pippi starting school, organising a picnic, going to circus, getting visited by burglars, visiting a coffee party and celebrating her birthday. In the next book, *Pippi Långstrump går ombord* (1946), the episodes include, for example, Pippi

going shopping, joining a school excursion, visiting a fare and is getting shipwrecked. Also, her long lost father shows up in this book, and wants to take her with him to an island where he is king. Pippi first decides to leave with him, but changes her mind in the very last minute, when she sees how upset her friends Tommy and Annika get to seeing her go. In the third and last book, *Pippi Långstrump i Söderhavet* (1948), Pippi, decides together with Tommy and Annika to adventurously travel to the Pacific's, to visit her father's island. And the book includes episodes like, Pippi goes aboard, goes ashore and talks some sense into a shark etc.

The many roles and functions of Pippi

So, who is Pippi as a character? Many adjectives come to mind: fearless, brave, imaginative, kind, thoughtful, shameless, omnipotent. Is she everything a child would like to be or would like a friend to be? Through the years, Pippi as a character has been analysed, described and presented in many ways. She has been the symbol of various ideas and convictions.

For instance, Pippi can be seen as a symbol, or personification, of freedom (as discussed briefly in the genre categorisation). Vivi Edström states that Pippi is a breathtaking example of the new values, that modernism created – that made being an orphan or waif into a metaphor for liberation (Edström, 2004). And, she continues, that Pippi as a character defies and mocks almost all of the expectations that are connected to the prototype of the miserable and abandoned child from older children's stories (Edström, 2004). Also, Ulla Lundqvist writes, that former lonely and orphan children's book characters have an altogether different set of feelings towards their situation compared to Pippi's standpoint of being alone (Lundqvist, 1979). These characters, according to Lundqvist, want and wish for nothing more than finding parents and a home. While Pippi, on the other hand, is fine being alone since it makes her free – in this way Astrid Lindgren is able to turn a children's book template upside down (Lundqvist, 1979). Actually, according to Lundqvist, the absence of parents is a necessary condition for her whole portrayal. She claims that the entire depiction of Pippi depends on it, a couple of immensely caring parents or even completely uncaring parents, would not have fitted into the story's pattern (Lundqvist, 1979). “Pippi måste vara ensam – samt stark och rik – för att kunna förkroppsliga den obegränsade friheten”, “*Pippi has to be alone – and*

also strong and rich – to be able to embody the ultimate freedom” (Lundqvist, 1979).

If Pippi can be seen from a modernistic standpoint as a metaphor for liberation, one could in turn, according to Edström, from a post modernistic viewpoint, question if she has an identity at all – if she even is a child (Edström, 2004). Marit Törnqvist points out, that one could wonder if Pippi really exists at all. She could, in fact, be just a wishful projection of the two, sometimes too well behaved, siblings Tommy and Annika, who live quite uneventful lives (*Allrakäraste Astrid*, Törnqvist, 2001). Törnqvist continues, that one could possibly also interpret Pippi as an adult – an adult who never stopped playing. On account of her self-reliance and complete independence, and last but not least her responsibility, she resembles – from a child's perspective – an adult more than a child from time to time (*Allrakäraste Astrid*, Törnqvist, 2001).

Following the above line of thought, that Pippi could be the wishful projection of Tommy and Annika, one could even question the Pippi's character's status of being the protagonist. Nikolajeva writes that since the story revolves around her, one naturally assumes that Pippi, the title figure, is the protagonist (Nikolajeva, 2004). On the other hand, according to Nikolajeva, one could also interpret Pippi as a character who has the main function of bringing the adventure into ordinary children's life. She is then not seen as a protagonist but an initiator of change – a catalytic character (Nikolajeva, 2004). Furthermore, there is the belief, that many children also rather identify with Tommy and Annika, than with Pippi herself (*Allrakäraste Astrid*, Törnqvist, 2001). According to Törnqvist, children seem to identify with the more “normal” and ordinary siblings, although they wish to have Pippi as their friend and playmate. This is because Pippi is not only an exciting friend due to her world travel experiences, independence and her super strengths, but she is also a truly play-skilled child, that tells the most amusing stories and invents the most exciting games (*Allrakäraste Astrid*, Törnqvist, 2001).

Pippi has also been described as a super-child – a child in position of power. According to Vibeke Stybe, Pippi's position of power can be seen as a manifestation of the child's inner need of taking command over the adults (Stybe, 1971). Ulla Lundqvist, on the other hand, sees Pippi more like a superior or an equal to the adults, rather than in a power position over them (Lundqvist, 1979). She writes, that Pippi is a child that cannot be repressed or subdued by the adults' powers and authority. Her superiority over adults stems from her sense of fairness, consideration and generosity (Lundqvist, 1979). Lundqvist

brings up, that Astrid Lindgren herself talked about Pippi as character in position of power, that she believed that a key to Pippi's popularity was, that she satisfied children's power dreams over adults. Though, she was very clear to point out what kind of power position Pippi holds – one that always means well (Lundqvist, 1979).

So Pippi seems to have many different functions and roles. However, there seems to be an agreement, that one of Pippi's greatest or even main purpose has been to take a stand for children. For example Ulla Lundqvist writes, that she understood already at the age of seven, that the grown-up person who had come up with this character truly stood on children's side – and was speaking for children's rights (Lundqvist, 1979). According to Lundqvist, at the time when the first Pippi book was published in 1945, the view of children had changed: the conventional and authoritarian approach was replaced by new ideas of a freer upbringing. Children's needs and the importance of play were on the agenda. Although for most children at the time, the reality was still about force and punishment (Lundqvist, 1979). Ulla Lundqvist (born in 1938) describes herself belonging to a generation that was raised in a conventional authoritarian manner. And she continues, that for her, and her peers, the meeting with Pippi was a relief, a safety valve and a liberating experience – Pippi's whole person and character was a manifested standpoint in favour of children, in the battle that always, on some level, goes on between children and adults (Lundqvist, 1979).

The above notions of Pippi, for example, personifying freedom and being a super-child in power position over adults, all play into the view of Pippi as a utopian figure. Which means, according to Charlotta Ödman, seeing Pippi as a utopian fantasy, a dream vision of everything a child would like to be but cannot (Ödman, 2007). She writes that, within the critical literature about Pippi, words like safety valve, compensatory experience and discharge, relate to interpreting that a child's wishful dreams about strength, courage, power and freedom is projected onto Pippi – the free and powerful character. In this way the Pippi stories have been viewed as a sort of compensatory stories – what a child can not live out in reality, can instead be lived out subliminally in stories (Ödman, 2007).

Super child or a normal, but lonely child?

Even though, Charlotta Ödman agrees with Lundqvist, that taking a stand on the behalf of children, was most likely the foremost intention with the Pippi books. She however disagrees with the notion that Astrid Lindgren meant to do so by presenting a relieving or compensatory utopia (Ödman, 2007). On the contrary, according to Ödman, Astrid Lindgren meant to signal and tell children how free they actually are. That they are free even if the adult world is trying to make them into small, well behaved children, like Tommy and Annika. She states that, “Pippi är inte ett superbarn mer än någon annan, hon är ett alldeles vanligt barn”, “*Pippi is not a super-child, not more than anyone else, she is a completely normal child*” (Ödman, 2007). According to Ödman, Astrid Lindgren makes her first serious attempt at depicting the inner beings of children and children's reality with the character Pippi, which is, for example, demonstrated in the depiction of Pippi's loneliness (Ödman, 2007).

Ödman writes that, when people are asked what they first come to think of, when it comes to Pippi, they usually first mention her quite special looks, or her money and super strength. More specific remarks cover statements like, Pippi being the greatest role model for girls, because of her independence and backbone. Also, her kindness, responsibility, imagination and creativeness are mentioned (Ödman, 2007). Even though that all of the above mentioned qualities are valid perceptions of Pippi's portrayal, according to Ödman, the absolute first thing that is told about Pippi is that she is alone. All of the other features, like her strength, wealth and her particular looks, are mentioned first later on in the first book, *Pippi Långstrump* (1945). It is significant, Ödman states, that it is loneliness that ends the Pippi trilogy in *Pippi Långstrump i Söderhavet* (1948) (Ödman, 2007): The story comes to an end with Tommy and Annika watching from afar into Pippi's kitchen window in the evening. There they see Pippi sitting alone at the kitchen table, her head resting against her arms. With a dreamy expression on her face she stares into the flame of a candle. Annika says with a shivering voice, that Pippi looks so lonely somehow, and she wishes it would already be morning so they could go and visit her. The children wish for Pippi to look in their direction so they can wave to her, but Pippi continues to stare at the light and then finally she blows it out.

Ödman states that, when Pippi herself speaks about being on her own, she makes it abundantly clear, that her independence is something that she values and protects. She also reassures her dead mother in heaven, that she will always manage, that her mother should not worry (Ödman, 2007). When

it comes to Pippi's father, who is lost at sea, she is convinced he is not dead, but will eventually show up one day and take her with him. Ödman wonders, if the possible return of the father is the very hope that keeps Pippi's existence and way of life together. She writes that, one can suspect that her carefully constructed independent way of life is quite fragile and her loneliness problematic (Ödman, 2007).

To demonstrate this, Ödman mentions one specific episode in the book, *Pippi går ombord* (1946). In this episode Pippi goes to a market with Tommy and Annika, where they see a theatre performance. The performance surprisingly hits Pippi emotionally with full power. The play is altogether very melodramatic – the heroine, countess Aurora tragically loses her entire family. At one point, Aurora declares loudly that she wishes for her own death. This desperate declaration makes Pippi break down completely in tears, and her emotional outburst and grief interrupts the whole play. While sobbing her heart out, Pippi tries to comfort the lonely countess and offers to share her own home with her.

The fact that Pippi offers the adult Aurora to share her home – her guarded territory of independence – can be seen as a measurement of that Pippi is truly emotionally moved by the drama, according to Ödman. Moreover, because of Pippi's strong response, the assumption can be made, that the play perhaps reminded Pippi of her own life situation. That her overwhelming grief lets the reader pick up on, that Pippi possibly sees her own loneliness, vulnerability and life drama played out by the countess Aurora on stage (Ödman, 2007). At that moment, Ödman writes, that Astrid Lindgren lets the despair of Pippi's loneliness surface behind the strong front of the Pippi character (Ödman, 2007).

To conclude, Ödman sees Pippi as a portrayal and description of a lonely child coping with the reality of her loneliness. Within this context she mentions two other researches, the before quoted, philosophers Jørgen Gaare and Øystein Sjaastad (Ödman, 2007). They also view Pippi as an emotionally normal child, and they to have observed and given attention to Pippi's dilemma with loneliness. Gaare and Sjaastad claim that the psychological description of Pippi safely falls in the category of realism – her strength being actually the only supernatural detail. According to Gaare and Sjaastad, she is a normal child emotionally. Although she is more fearless than her peers, she is just as vulnerable (Gaare and Sjaastad, 2002).

Gaare and Sjaastad claim, that Pippi's personality and behaviour are realistically depicted, when considering her status of being an abandoned child.

Gaare and Sjaastad state, that an abandoned child is forced to take over the adult role against his or her will. And furthermore, that the lack of care can make a child precociously optimistic. Also, these children avoid and loathe hearing about and being reminded of their own pain (Gaare and Sjaastad, 2002). In this way, according to Gaare and Sjaastad, the theory of the reactions of the abandoned child can be applied to Pippi's character. For example, in her reassuring statement to her dead mother in heaven, that she should not worry, that Pippi will always manage. To Gaare and Sjaastad, Pippi's statement sounds admirably brave in all its optimism. However, they believe that within this reassuring statement, concealed depression and despair is expressed (Gaare and Sjaastad, 2002). Moreover – like the overly optimistic child that hates being reminded of their pain – she presents being left to fend for her own, as something wonderfully privileged, according to Gaare and Sjaastad, like when she explains to Tommy and Annika (Gaare and Sjaastad, 2002):

- Min mamma är en ängel och min pappa är negerkung, det är minsann inte alla barn som har så fina föräldrar, brukar Pippi säga så förnöjt.
- *My mother is an angel and my father is a cannibal-king, it is certainly not all children that that have such grand parents, Pippi usually says contentedly.*

According to Gaare and Sjaastad, Pippi is seen as the marvellous happy entertainer throughout the Pippi stories – being the fool, clown, circus-performer and stand-up comedian. However, they claim that Pippi is actually a tragic-comic figure, that by clowning around, and coming up with all sorts of carnival-like fun and games, Pippi manages to keep her own angst and sadness at bay (Gaare and Sjaastad, 2002). Sometimes though, the repressed angst of Pippi shines through according to Gaare and Sjaastad. They bring up, as an example, that a hint of angst can be seen in the fact, that Pippi chooses to sleep with her feet resting on the pillow, while the rest of her body and head are under the blanket. Gaare and Sjaastad write, that this sleeping habit of Pippi has been viewed as something disrespectfully optimistic and remarkable, rather than an expression of angst. Though, in fact, choosing to sleep with your head under the blanket can be seen as a sign of angst and a need to protect oneself against any threat from the surrounding world (Gaare and Sjaastad, 2002).

The children's book author Ulf Stark also writes about Pippi's struggles with loneliness. Stark reminiscences in the book *Allrakäraste Astrid – En vän-*

bok till Astrid Lindgren (2001), about his childhood memories of Pippi: Stark remembers, that at bedtime when his mother used to read out loud from the Pippi books to him and his brother, the reading sessions was constantly interrupted by his mother's happy laughter. She was truly enjoying Pippi's grand rebelliousness – laughing so hard at times, that tears kept running down her face. Meanwhile, Stark himself was not laughing at all. What he instead, as a child, saw in Pippi was the sadness of a girl that was abandoned by her father, and who has a dead mother. Stark writes, that the fact that Pippi was making up fantastical stories, did not surprise him at all, and no wonder that she came up with so many pranks. Clearly it was all done by Pippi to forget how lonely and sad she was. Furthermore, Stark and his brother were even in full agreement about the fact that Pippi had made up Tommy and Annika. Pippi had, of course, in her loneliness invented Tommy and Annika to be her make believe friends – she needed to have two normal friends to play, hunt treasures and bake cakes with (*Allrakäraste Astrid*, Stark, 2001).

Stark continues, that he loved Astrid Lindgren and all her books when he was a child. What he loved most about the stories was how they made him feel – they made him like himself (*Allrakäraste Astrid*, Stark, 2001). The Pippi books and the figure Pippi made Stark like himself because he saw and recognised himself in the Pippi character. Specifically, he recognised her loneliness – her existential loneliness. Stark explains, that even though he had a lovely laughing mother and lots of friends, it happened that a feeling of absolute loneliness came over him during his childhood. He describes it like a sad shadow that lived deep inside of him, that no one else could see, but whenever his mother read about Pippi, the sad shadow smiled and felt less lonely. And Stark himself felt better, although Pippi never made him laugh (*Allrakäraste Astrid*, Stark, 2001).

Understanding the loneliness

It is interesting and somewhat baffling, that the author Ulf Stark saw and understood the loneliness of the Pippi character already as a child, and in such a profound way. His childhood interpretation, of Tommy and Annika as being Pippi's imaginary friends, is also the complete opposite of the many adult analyses of Pippi being made up by Tommy and Annika (Ödman, 2007). Though, perhaps it is not so strange, that children, or at least some children, can sense and recognise Pippi's loneliness, or that they can interpret her actions with her

loneliness in mind. According to Ljungström, children can, as well as adults, mirror themselves in fictive characters. Much like adults, children read because they want to be entertained, inspired and to get an understanding about life. The only thing that differs is that children have different interests and preferences than adults (Ljungström, 2006). Ljungström continues, that already at the age of three and four, children start contemplating death, for example, and that they have a will of their own. And as earlier presented, she writes that this is the very moment in time, that books start becoming a true asset, for children's understanding of the world, themselves, death, love, melancholy, joy and life itself (Ljungström, 2006).

However, I keep wondering, if it is actually possible to depict such complicated feelings as repressed loneliness in children's books – so as children would understand? In Pippi's case, the depiction of loneliness is also done in such a subtle way, that one wonders if it is noticeable, or even intentional? Like Gaare and Sjaastad state, the mood in the Pippi books is kept constantly high by Pippi, the entertainer (Gaare and Sjaastad, 2002). It is not easy to see beyond her happy mood and all the exciting adventures. Pippi for example never thinks or speaks about her loneliness – other than in order to deny it. Actually, according to Edström, Astrid Lindgren seems even to be quite wary about expressing the inner consciousness of Pippi. She mentions that Tommy and Annika's inner thoughts are expressed but never Pippi's. In the book, *Pippi Långstrump går ombord* (1946), one can read that “Vad Pippi tänkte på är inte gott att veta”, “*What Pippi was thinking about is not good to know*” (Edström, 2004).

Instead, Pippi's inner battle with loneliness is only visible and presented to the reader via quite small clues. And though realistically depicted, Pippi's loneliness is expressed by her behaving completely the opposite of what most people would expect of an abandoned child. For example, as previously mentioned, by her behaving precociously optimistic. Only at times, her struggle with loneliness becomes more evident, like in the theatre episode mentioned earlier, when Pippi actually breaks down in tears of empathy for the lonely Aurora. In that episode Pippi's facade shatters and her loneliness is evident. All in all, for an adult reader, perhaps it is not all that difficult to read between the lines and interpret the character Pippi as lonely. However, that Pippi's loneliness would be visible for children to grasp, is quite remarkable.

Although, perhaps there is a trick to it, or actually a wonderful skill to it – to be able to depict tragedy for children. According to Vivi Edström, Astrid Lind-

gren uses her double insight in her stories, she uses the memory of how it was to be a child and combines it with adult knowledge and experience (Edström, 1992). In this way, Gaare and Sjaastad write, an author can present a brand new fantasy world, that children can see before themselves in all their innocence, that, at the same time, is a world that is illuminated by the more wise adult storytellers melancholy – a melancholy that children can sense at times, but perhaps not yet name or describe (Gaare and Sjaastad, 2002). And Edström writes, “... Astrid lurar inte barnen, inte heller deras föräldrar. Hon säger inte att livet är lätt och idylliskt. Hennes böcker innehåller en kulturkritik som bottnar i medvetandet om allas vår utsatthet”, “... *Astrid does not fool the children, neither their parents. She does not say, that life is easy and idyllic. Her books consist of a cultural critique that stems from the awareness of everyone's vulnerability*” (Edström, 2004).

Thus, one can see and explain Pippi's subtle battle with loneliness as an intentional part of her character and the story. That, like in all her other stories, Astrid Lindgren uses here her double insight as an author. Pippi's loneliness is meant to be sensed, recognised, or perhaps even seen clearly, by children. However, it is surely so subtly described and paired with humour for a reason. Pippi's loneliness is not meant to be something too frightening, it is just a part of her – or a part of the melancholy of Astrid Lindgren. And moreover, according to Gaare and Sjaastad, through humour we can stand more of the difficult and threatening, than we otherwise could (Gaare and Sjaastad 2002). Edström writes that, Astrid Lindgren was never one to shy away from including, and combining, humorous and utterly tragic topics in her children's books. And she fiercely defended – while pointing out that she never wrote stories to cause any angst in children – her right to write about the more tragic topics with her belief, that everybody, children as well as adults, is interested in the greater topics of life, like death and love (Edström, 1997).

The fact that it is specifically loneliness that Astrid Lindgren has let – the otherwise so strong and confident – Pippi to struggle with, surely has its reason as well. Loneliness is a universal emotion and it is one of the great topics in life. In the words of Lena Kåreland, “... i rädslan för att bli ensam och övergiven kan alla, oavsett kön och ålder, känna igen sig”, “... *in the fear of being alone and abandoned, can everybody, no matter what gender or age, recognise*” (Kåreland, 2013).

So, there are surely children, that can see beyond the hilariousness of Pippi, and as clear as day, recognise and analyse her loneliness. While others proba-

bly just sense it, until they are ready to see. Personally, as a child, I believe I sensed Pippi's loneliness, rather than had explicit knowledge about it. Even though, like most children, I adored Pippi, I still remember feeling a bit sceptical towards her. She somehow seemed too good to be true. Though, I doubt that my scepticism concerning Pippi's "trueness" had anything to do with her nature as a fictive character. Pippi was completely believable, even her less normal qualities, the super strength, was of no concern. Rather, I believe, that the small but nagging scepticism was there, because I felt, that Pippi at times had to be faking her happiness. She was just a little bit too happy-go-lucky. Something did not quite add up with Pippi's constant shenanigans and happy facade and, once in while, this troubled me a bit.

Furthermore, it was actually clear to me, that Pippi truly preferred company from solitude. No child on this earth, has worked so hard to get other children to stay and play with her. Though, not by far, did I have such profound understanding of the sad lonely reasons behind Pippi's mad stories and never ending fun as Ulf Stark had. However, I do remember being consciously concerned about why Pippi felt the need to bribe Tommy and Annika and the other children of the town. Not only did she bribe them with fun games and adventures to get them to stay, but also her generosity was limitless: treasure hunts, handing out presents left and right, and candy for everyone, and so on. I was worried for her sake, did she not know or understand that everyone would love her anyway?⁷

The memorable Pippi

The more I think about it, I actually do not perceive it as a problem, that, as a child, I did not understand Pippi fully. Quite the opposite, it is one of the good qualities of Pippi, that her character is not so easy to grasp for all children. It just means that Pippi has layers that you can figure out more about as you grow older. Pippi's loneliness is even less outspoken in the many picture books about her, for the smallest children, than in the more text based original trilogy. This lets her character keep unfolding as children grow older and

⁷ This is a notion that Nikolajeva has picked up on. She writes that Pippi "... is not merely generous because she is strong and rich but also because she is lonely – a well-known phenomenon of a lonely, unhappy child who "buys friendship" (Nikolajeva, 2002).

read and learn more about her. Which, in turn, keeps her interesting, mystical and memorable – a character you keep coming back to and a character that works for all ages.

Pippi is a great children's book character. And she is memorable for many reasons – she is the symbol of freedom, a super-child, a safety valve, a dream friend etc., and she is, in the words of Vivi Edström "... som ett fruktbart kaos som låter det autentiska livet, det genuina, kreativa frodas samtidigt som hon ger perspektiv på maktfullkomlighet, enfald och låsta strukturer", "... *like a fruitful chaos that lets the authentic life, the genuine, the creative flourish while at the same time give perspective on dictatorality, stupidity and locked structures*" (Edström, 2004).

No doubt about it, Pippi is surely all things mentioned above and much more. But in all her super-humanness and fabulousness, she is also very human – a child – with the same needs and sorrows like any other child. I agree fully with Gaare and Sjaastad, when they write, that Pippi Långstrump belongs to the absolute upper level of all the fictive world stars, that she belongs to the same class as Winnie the Pooh, Robinson Crusoe, Tarzan, Faust and Hamlet. And that just like them, she is a "... mytisk figur, arketypisk varelse, som i sin övermänsklighet har träffat på något djupt mänskligt", "... *mythical, archetypical being that has, in all her superhumanity, being able to strike upon something deeply human*" (Gaare and Sjaastad, 2002).

As Ulla Lundqvist stated above, Pippi needs for the story's sake to be alone – a couple of parents in the background would not have worked. The story and Pippi's character would not have been the same (Lundqvist, 1979). To be an orphan is a part of Pippi, and a part of what makes her truly great as a character, is that she actually does suffer from it. In all of Pippi's, toughness, strength and independence, she also displays feelings of sadness and loneliness. In addition, Pippi becomes very endearing in all her efforts of trying so hard not to show or confess these weaknesses to anyone.

I believe that the small weaknesses of Pippi, in an otherwise strong and confident character, adds to her character's depth, and allows her to be someone to identify and empathise with. By contrast, if Astrid Lindgren would have kept Pippi as strong, anarchistic and confident as she is, but completely indifferent towards her own lonely situation, she would have been a much flatter, and actually boring character, in my opinion. Pippi's humanity and weaknesses elevate her.

The visual depiction of Pippi

For the first manuscript, Astrid Lindgren made her own drawing of Pippi – her picture shows a tall and slender girl, wearing a short two-coloured dress. In this image, Pippi is already blessed with her characteristic wild red braids and oversized black shoes (picture 1). However, according to Edström, she resembles perhaps more a teenager than a nine-year old (Edström, 2004). Törnqvist writes, that it was after the revised manuscript had won a contest and was to be published, that the Danish artist Ingrid Vang Nyman was given the opportunity of making a test illustration of Pippi, based on Astrid Lindgren's drawing and the description in the book. Törnqvist continues, that Astrid Lindgren said yes immediately when she saw Vang Nyman's interpretation of Pippi – the portrait was not only correct, it was genius (Allrakäraste Astrid, Törnqvist, 2001). For the first book, Vang Nyman made eight black and white line drawings plus a coloured cover, and she continued to illustrate the two other parts of the trilogy.

In the first book, *Pippi Långstrump*, the reader gets a full description of Pippi's quite special and amusing looks:

Hennes hår hade samma färg som en morot och var flätat i två hårda flätor som stod rätt ut. Hennes näsa hade samma fason som en mycket liten potatis, och den var alldeles prickig av fräknar. Under näsan satt en verkliga mycket bred mun med friska vita tänder. Hennes klänning var rätt egendomlig. Pippi hade själv sytt den. Det var meningen att den skulle bli blå, men det blåa tyget räckte inte, så Pippi fick lov att sy dit lite röda tygbitar här och där. På hennes långa, smala ben satt ett par långa strumpor, den ena brun och den andra svart. Och så hade hon ett par svarta skor som var precis dubbelt så långa som hennes fötter. De skorna hade hennes pappa köpt åt henne i Sydamerika, för att hon skulle ha lite att växa i, och Pippi ville aldrig ha några andra.

Her hair was of the same colour as a carrot and was braided into two tight braids that were standing straight out. Her nose had the same shape as a very small potato, and it was all covered with freckles. Below the nose there was a truly wide mouth with healthy white teeth. Her dress was quite particular. Pippi herself had sown it. The intention was that it was going to be blue, but there was not enough blue fabric, so Pippi had to attach some red pieces of cloth a bit here and there. On her long, slender legs she had on a pair of long

stockings, one brown and the other black. And then she had on a pair of black shoes that were exactly double as long as her feet. Those shoes her father had bought for her in South America, so she should have something to grow in, and Pippi never wanted any other.

This is quite literally how Vang Nyman has visualised the appearance of Pippi. Vang Nyman's Pippi is blessed with ridiculously oversized shoes and the brave braided hair. Although, often in her illustrations, the braid on one side is completely loosened up. Pippi's face and nose are round, her mouth wide, and in most pictures an abundance of freckles cover her entire face. Compared to Astrid Lindgren's own picture, Pippi looks now much younger (Edström, 2004). In my opinion Pippi looks even younger than Pippi's supposed age of nine.

According to Vivi Edström, Pippi Långstrump is an "... inkarnation av rörelse. Hon är en estradör som älskar snabba scenväxlingar". "... *incarnation of movement. She is an entertainer that loves quick changes of scenery*" (Edström, 2007). In all three books, Pippi seems always to be in motion, when she is not wrestling with thieves or bullies, or climbing houses, she is carrying horses around, or climbing trees to save children out of burning buildings (picture 2 and 3). Not only is Pippi physically always on the go, she is also verbally very active. Ulla Lundqvist writes that Pippi is not saying things, she is yelling (Lundqvist, 1979). Pippi speaks, jokes, makes puns, makes up unbelievable anecdotes, brags and lies her heart out in a furiously fast manner. According to Edström, verbs related to movement prevail – which gives the story a fiercely fast tempo (Edström, 1992).

These fast constant movements of Pippi and the fast tempo of the story, is, in my opinion, reflected and enhanced through Vang Nyman's images. Pippi is often visualised in full action, for example wrestling a shark or in full gallop on the back of her horse (picture 4). Her arms, legs and hair seem to be in motion almost at all times. At points, her whole body is pictured in mid-air movement (picture 5). Actually, all characters seem often to be in the middle of some form of action. The style of drawing also contributes to impression of motion. Vang Nyman's drawing style is both playfully naive and somehow restless, which enhances the liveliness of the illustrations. For example, in the picture where Pippi is being chased by two police officers on top of her house. In this free-minded perspective drawing, it is not only the characters that are moving, the house itself appears to be in motion (picture 6). All windows, the door and even



2.



3.



4.



5.

Picture 2, 3, 4 and 5: from *Pippi Långstrump* (p. 9, 152, 50 and 120, 1945, 1992).

the porch appear unhinged, moving in different directions. Wind has caught the curtains and even the roof tiles seem to have a life of their own. The entire image feels alive.

Pippi's unrestrained and confident personality is also enhanced by the illustrations – generally Pippi looks almighty powerful. In my opinion, her eyes and facial expressions continuously seem to say, that all is play. Even if Pippi is threatened and chased by the police – she makes the chase into fun and games, while looking mischievous and happy as a clam. When Pippi, in a quite anarchistic manner, is seen eating an entire cake at a coffee party, much to the attending ladies indignation, she seems unbothered and showing no shame in her expression, as she is contentedly munching away (picture 7). Pippi's anarchistic side is also present in the picture where she is painting a fancy lady on a wall. Lundqvist even interprets Pippi's facial expression in this image as being almost satanically content (Lundqvist, 1979). This interpretation seems to me a bit overly dramatic though. I would rather interpret her face expressing perhaps concentration and satisfaction in her work (picture 8).

Generally the illustrations convey no weaknesses of Pippi – except for two pictures. The first, is a picture from the episode where Pippi is joining a school outing. The text tells that during the outing the children are playing that Pippi is a monster, and the monster is chasing them all around, threatening to boil them all for dinner. But all of a sudden everything becomes still and silent, so Tommy and Annika rush to see what is the matter. They find Pippi sitting on a rock – looking odd and staring at something in her hand – a dead baby bird. Pippi is crying over the dead bird but refuses to admit it:

– Gråter – jag! sa Pippi. Jag gråter visst inte ... – Rödögd – jag! Nej, inte må du tro att jag gråter för en sån här liten skruttfågel, sa Pippi.

– *Crying* – me! said Pippi. I am not crying ... – Red eyed – me! No, you cannot believe that I would cry for a little scruffy bird like this one, said Pippi.

Contrarily to her verbal denial, the picture shows the truth – she is crying (picture 9). With a dispirited expression she is shown sitting on a rock with her eyes closed, a stream of tears running down her face. She is holding in her hand the little bird and she seems to be stroking it gently. Pippi appears for the first time subdued and sad. Gaare and Sjaastad interpret Pippi's denial as defence mechanism – rejecting her own sensitivity. They write that, “I sin motvilja mot drag i den egna personligheten som man helst vill vara utan,



Picture 6: from *Pippi Långstrump* (p. 41, 1945, 1992).



7.



8.

Picture 7 and 8: from *Pippi Långstrump* (p. 130 and 144, 1945, 1992).

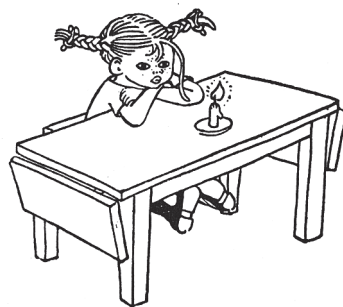


9.

Picture 9: from *Pippi Långstrump går ombord* (p. 49, 1946, 2009).

går man till motsatt ytterlighet och överkompenserar genom att framhålla de komplementära dragen: tuffhet, hårdhet och okänslighet”, “*In the aversion against traits of the own personality one rather would be without, one goes to the opposite extreme and overly compensates by emphasizing the complementary traits: toughness, hardness and insensitivity*” (Gaare and Sjaastad, 2002).

The second picture, in which Pippi seem to appear less strong, is also the very last picture in the trilogy. The image is accompanying the ending scene of the trilogy, and was discussed earlier in relation to Pippi's loneliness. The verbal text describes Tommy and Annika watching from afar straight into Pippi's kitchen in the evening. The children see her sitting there and they think she looks lonely. The picture – showing Pippi sitting at her table, staring into a candlelight – enhances and confirms the text (picture 10). She does appear lonely and sad. Her facial expression is almost blank, as lost in thought. Her head is resting against her arms, and the arms are crossed in such a way, that it almost looks like she is hugging, or holding on to herself. There is nothing tough or happy-go-lucky about her in this image – she has finally let her guard down.



Picture 10: from *Pippi Långstrump i Söderhavet* (p.167, 1948, 1992).

3

Knyttet

The author, illustrator and artist, Tove Jansson is mostly known and famous for her novels about the Mumin world. But she also wrote and illustrated altogether three picture books. The books are *Hur gick det sen?* (1952), *Vem ska trösta knyttet?* (1960) and *Den farliga resan* (1977). Even though the time between publishing dates of the three books span over 25 years, Kåreland and Werkmäster state, that the books can be viewed as a coherent trilogy. This is because they share the same basic theme – that of a wandering journey. Which, Kåreland and Werkmäster claim, is a core structure that can be seen to have a deeper meaning of inner development and the search for identity (Kåreland and Werkmäster, 1994). In the first book, *Hur gick det sen?*, the reader gets to follow the Mumin troll as he tries to get home with a can of milk to his mother. This becomes a journey full of trials and even horror. In the third book, *Den farliga resan*, a very bored girl, Susanna ends up on strange and dangerous journey together with a hemul, Tofslan, Vislan and a scared dog. The journey taken by Knyttet, in the second book, *Vem ska trösta knyttet?*, initially has the nature of escape. The very lonely and scared troll flees his home in the early morning, with no plan or direction in mind.

The story about Knyttet

In *Vem ska trösta knyttet?* the reader gets to know Knyttet as a very lonely creature. He is living all alone in a lonely house. The nights are worst for him, because then he feels far lonelier than he thought he was. He needs to turn on all the lights and underneath the blanket he stays whimpering through the night – scared of the hemul's that are stomping outside.

With no one to comfort his fears, he makes an escape in the morning, too frightened to stay another night. Out in the world he goes, meeting people everywhere but there is no one he knows. Too shy and scared to make contact with strangers, he keeps his distance and hides, making it impossible to meet

any new friends. At one point Knytttet feels exhausted. His new shoes are too tight and his bag feels too heavy, he sits down on top of his bag to rest. While he is sitting there, the wind from the sea lets him hear the tones from a flute being played by Snusmumriken. On tired legs Knytttet keeps on wandering, he passes a hemul that is celebrating with a grandiose party with carrousels, balloons and fireworks. From the outside Knytttet watches the wonderful party, feeling as lonely as can be, but still not daring to join the others. Eventually Knytttet ends up on the beach, finding there a big white seashell. The shell's beauty fills him with joy, and Knytttet sits down on beach and relaxes for the first time. He collects beautiful pebbles in his hat and enjoys the calmness of the sea. Yet, Knytttet stills feels sad, and he cannot explain why.

That night a bottle, with a letter inside, floats ashore. Knytttet reads the saddest, loneliest letter written by a little skrutt pleading for help and comfort. Upon reading the letter Knytttet immediately turns brave, strong and happy, and he takes a cold but happy swim in the sea. Then he empties his bag and uses it as a boat – rowing out to sea in search for Skruttet. The night has turned beautiful because someone needs a small knytt.

Next morning on Knytttet's sea quest for finding Skruttet, he greets with confidence and bravery anyone who passes him. For the first time he gets noticed and surely he would love to talk some more – but who would then comfort Skruttet, he asks himself. When evening falls, the terrible cry of Mårran far away frightens Knytttet so much, that he quickly hides in the first hole in the ground he finds. But soon enough he jumps up and continues his quest, more angry than scared – he needs to save and comfort Skruttet, because she is probably far more scared than he is. By thinking about her fear, he manages to overcome his own. Later on, in the night, Knytttet suddenly finds himself face to face with the frightening Mårran – big and grey as a rock. The scared Knytttet dances a little war dance to brave up before biting Mårran in the tail. Mårran, caught by surprise, flees into the forest. And there, on a rock, watching the battle between Knytttet and Mårran, sits Skruttet.

Knytttet has found Skruttet and his knees become weak by the mere sight of her. They do not speak – they are too shy. Knytttet decides to write her a letter so he can tell her about his great loneliness, and all the things he saw, and what he went through in his quest to find her. But it is impossible, no matter how hard he tries, no letter gets written. The letter should instead be written by the reader so that Skruttet can understand Knytttet. When Skruttet reads this letter she falls into the arms of Knytttet – whispering to him to forget the horrible

past and instead think of the happy future. They travel the same evening by boat – a light-filled festive scenery surrounding them. So it ends, Knytttet and Skruttet are going to comfort each other and never be scared again. The couple settle down in the seashell house on the beach and are going to live happily ever after.

The story's message

The message of *Vem ska trösta knyttet?* is quite clear. Boel Westin writes, that the story deals with outspoken psychological issues. “Vad som berättas är en historia om längtan och kärlek, om viljan att bli sedd och att *lära sig synas*”, “*What is told is a story about longing and love, the will to be seen, and learning how to be noticed*” (*Vår moderna bilderbok*, Westin, 1991). And furthermore, that the repeating sentence, “vem ska trösta knyttet?”, “*who should comfort knyttet?*”, that runs through the book, points to same direction – the importance of claiming a space in the world and learning how to be a part of a group (*Vår moderna bilderbok*, Westin, 1991). Westin describes, that in the beginning of the book, Knytttet is an outsider – the pictures clearly depicting his isolation. The small and grey Knytttet is a longing voyeur of the, literally, colourful life that he wants nothing more than to be a part of. Through the many lessons he conquers on the way, he eventually gets what he dreams of – a sense of belonging. To illustrate how Tove Jansson evokes the reader's sympathy for Knytttet, but at the same time subtly conveys wisdom, Westin points to a specific scene in *Vem ska trösta knyttet?*, (*Vår moderna bilderbok*, Westin, 1991). The scene is the hemul's extravagant and wonderful party. Knytttet is standing on the outside looking in, with the accompanying line: “Men vem ska trösta knyttet med att säga som det är:/stig in och säg godafton så att de SER att du är här!”, “*But who should comfort knyttet by telling how it is:/walk in and say good evening so they SEE that you are there!*”

The inner journey of Knytttet

As mentioned earlier, the main frame for all three picture books by Tove Jansson is that of a wandering journey. The three main characters are all wanderers, either because they have a mission, are escaping from something or are seeking something (Kåreland and Werkmäster, 1994). The character Knytttet is both fleeing from and searching for something, and his journey has been ana-

lysed as an inner journey towards spiritual growth and self knowledge. Lena Kåreland and Barbro Werkmäster state, that the story can be psychologically described as a life crisis that is happily lived through – going from angst to peace and from horror to joy. They see this as a timeless topic, people of all ages go through similar life crises, that lead to developmental growth. They also add, that Knyttet's basic emotional problem of fear and loneliness is timeless as well (Kåreland and Werkmäster, 1994). Furthermore, Kåreland and Werkmäster write, that seen from a Jungian psychological perspective, Knyttet's journey moves toward personal fulfillment; it is an individuation process that is accomplished when the conscious is balanced with the unconscious – when a person has reached the inner core of himself/herself. As an illustrative example they bring up, that Knyttet's fight with Mårran can be interpreted as Knyttet fighting his own Shadow and successfully incorporating the Shadow into his personality (Kåreland and Werkmäster, 1994).

The inner journey of Knyttet visualised – the figure, the composition and the landscape

When it comes to the illustrations in *Vem ska trösta knyttet?*, they carry a heavy function in describing Knyttet. Knyttet is not only externally described, his inner life – struggles, growth and eventually happiness – is depicted visually. According to Nikolajeva, the images have the function of enhancing both Knyttet's permanent qualities and his changeable emotions (Nikolajeva, 2001). However, in my opinion, they are not just enhancing the portrayal of Knyttet, the images bear the same load as the narrative text, or even more.

Knyttet's character is dominated by his loneliness and fears, and already on the cover of the book he is depicted as a sad character (picture 11). In the picture, a group of seven colourful figures are talking lively to each other. In front of the group, with his back turned against them, stands Knyttet alone – huddled up, with his hands in his pockets, looking miserable. Contrary to the other characters in the picture, he is drawn almost completely in black, with only some pink highlighting his cheeks. Knyttet strikingly stands out from the happy group behind him – as the lonely outsider.

In the first spread of the book, Knyttet's scared personality is emphasised by depicting him sitting crouched and huddling over a lamp in a small room with no visible door or windows (picture 12). His eyes are looking big and scared. The picture's mood is dark and gloomy. It is drawn in black and with



Picture 11: from *Vem ska trösta knyttet?* (1969, 2001).



Picture 12: from *Vem ska trösta knyttet?* (1969, 2001).

only a few yellow accents of the lamplights. Kåreland and Werkmäster describe, that the image makes it concrete, that Knyttet's home can no longer provide light and warmth for him. Knyttet is just about to light the lamp on his knees and three other lamps are already lit, but their artificial lights are not able to give neither warmth or safety – Knyttet looks both lonely and frozen (Kåreland and Werkmäster, 1994).

This is the only image that is rectangular or framed, all the other images cover entire spreads or are free from background. The fact that is framed and quite small, adds to the sense of discomfort and entrapment, in my opinion. Furthermore, the picture is mostly drawn up using small, disconnected lines that adds to the feeling of distress in the image. Perry Nodelman writes that, "Joined to form spaces, lines develop solidity and seem stable; lines that do not connect enclose no space, create no solidity, and seem to have more energy – to be disordered" (Nodelman, 1988). This is close to the impression one gets of Knyttet in this picture. Small, disconnected lines build up his coat and trousers, while jagged bristly lines make up his hair. His visual appearance reflects a sense of nervous energy.

The second spread is illustrating Knyttet's panic flight from his home in the early morning. The image is dark, big trees and mist are surrounding the tiny frighten figure of Knyttet (picture 13). Here the same black and white line technique has been used as in the first image – continuing the same feeling of distress and restlessness. Both images are completely dominated by grey-ness and blackness, depicting Knyttet at his most vulnerable state – where he is completely lonely, scared and in despair (Kåreland and Werkmäster, 1994). The only other image that is as dark and grey, is the visualisation of Knyttet's battle with Mårran.

The following spreads continue to illustrate Knyttet's isolation and shyness. For example, Knyttet is placed hiding behind rocks in the very right low corner of the third spread (picture 14). There he stands, small, grey and separated from the lively action and the big colourful figures that dominate the image. Similarly, his isolation is depicted in the fifth spread, where he is seen standing alone, in darkness, and yet again surrounded by black trees (picture 15). Knyttet is completely hidden from the centre-staged happy figures that are enjoying the bright, sparkling festivities. That the hiding Knyttet is searching for company – to be a part of a group – is not verbally outspoken in the text, but can be understood by the way he is watching the others according to Kåreland and Werkmäster (Kåreland and Werkmäster, 1994). Half turned away, he

Picture 13: from *Vem ska trösta knyttet?* (1969, 2001).Picture 14: from *Vem ska trösta knyttet?* (1969, 2001).

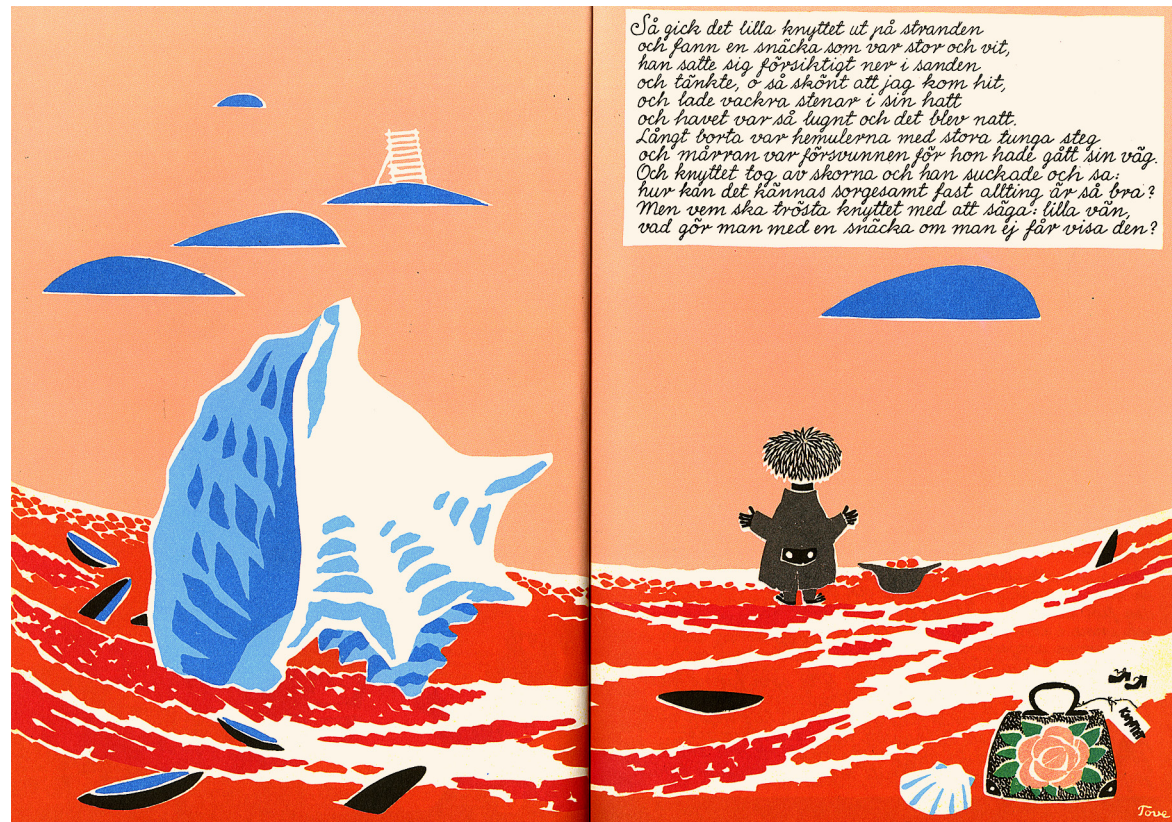


Picture 15: from *Vem ska trösta knyttet?* (1969, 2001).

is watching them, carefully and longingly. He evokes compassion not only by his loneliness, but he is also placed strategically in the picture, in the lower left corner – a position that is suggested to receive the most sympathy for a character (Nodelman, 1988).⁸ There is a striking difference between the two halves of the picture. The darkness is so very dark where Knyttet's stands in all his secluded loneliness, compared to the lightness and brightness of colour on the other side, with all the festivity and happy creatures.

Kåreland and Werkmäster write, that the colour choices of the pictures concretely visualise the different states of Knyttet's emotions. As mentioned above, at Knyttet's loneliest point, the pictures were dominated by grey and black, but as the story progresses – the more he gets into contact with others – the more colours are added, according to Kåreland and Werkmäster (Kåreland and Werkmäster, 1994). The colour choices also visualise the character Knyttet's new relaxed and somewhat happier mood in the sixth spread, where Knyttet has found a beach at the sea (picture 16). The colour scheme suddenly becomes lighter and softer, pink and blue dominate. It reflects that something has changed within Knyttet. Knyttet's pose tells the same, he has taken off his shoes, and hat, and is standing with his back against the reader. His posture has straightened out, he is no longer hunching his shoulders. Furthermore, his hands are no longer tucked away in his pockets. Instead his arms are stretched out in a gesture of perhaps embracing the sea. Kåreland and Werkmäster write, that Knyttet seems to be enjoying himself and living in the moment (Kåreland and Werkmäster, 1994). And yet, both text and colours confirm that he still feels sad and lonely. In the text, Knyttet wonders how he can feel sad when everything is fine. And even though the colours depict calmness and relaxation, the tones also evoke a sense of melancholy.

⁸ In Perry Nodelman's book, *Words about pictures*, he cites the theories of Mercedes Gaffron. Nodelman writes, that Mercedes Gaffron suggests that we conventionally look at pictures in a fixed manner, the "glance curve" – that moves from the left foreground back around the picture space to the right background. And since we look at the left foreground first, we usually place ourselves there and also usually identify with the object or figures found there: "we not only feel that the objects represented here are near to us, but also that they have greater importance to us. People represented here belong to our side in the figurative sense of the term, in contrast to the people on the right side" (Gaffron, 1950, as quoted by Nodelman, 1988). Furthermore, according to Nodelman, Gaffron suggest that a character will get the most compassion when he is placed on the lower left side with his back turned to the viewer, since this position is most similar to the viewers in connection to the image (Gaffron, 1950, as cited by Nodelman, 1988).



Picture 16: from *Vem ska trösta knyttet?* (1969, 2001).

When Knytttet has received the plea for help from Skruttet his mood changes, the text describes that everything seems different, enchanting and new. He has found his purpose, the letter has made him happy, given him strength but also a mission – saving Skruttet. Resolutely he turns his bag into a boat and starts his journey at new. In the spreads that follow, Knytttet's new confidence and determination is shown by him taking a place centre stage, no longer hiding. In the eight spread, for example, Knytttet is shown sitting in his boat-bag, still looking shy and small, but placed in the very middle of the action. He is surrounded and interacting with other figures (picture 17). Although, in the tenth spread, Knytttet momentarily loses his confidence when he hears the terrible cries of Mårran in the distance. Fear takes a hold of him, and it is visualised by yet again depicting Knytttet small, hiding behind a tree, and placed in the lower right corner. The tall dark forest looks overwhelmingly threatening, scary bat like creatures fly over Knytttet and small creatures glare at him (picture 18).

The next eleventh spread is illustrating Knytttet's dramatic – good versus evil – battle with Mårran (picture 19). The dramatic scene is set, according to Kåreland and Werkmäster, in a sterile landscape dominated by grey and black (Kåreland and Werkmäster, 1994). The landscape is composed of huge, pointy and grey rock formations, and grey clouds glide through the black sky, half covering the only light source – the full moon. Kåreland and Werkmäster write, that the the fateful mood of the image is underlined by the text (Kåreland and Werkmäster, 1994):

Nu tystnar allt, nu slocknar alla ljusen,
där sitter mårran ensam som ett berg
och runt omkring är hela marken frusen
och själva månen tappar all sin färg.

*Now all becomes silent, now all the lights go out,
and there sits mårran alone like a mountain
and all around the whole ground is frozen
and the moon itself has lost all its color.*

In the scene Knytttet is again standing on the left side of the spread, placed to get sympathy, and the character Mårran, is standing on the right page, the place of the villain (Nodelman, 1988). Skruttet sits on a rock watching the fight

Picture 17: from *Vem ska trösta knyttet?* (1969, 2001).Picture 18: from *Vem ska trösta knyttet?* (1969, 2001).



Picture 19: from *Vem ska trösta knyttet?* (1969, 2001).

from above, resembling, in Kåreland's and Werkmäster's words, a fair lady watching her brave knight in medieval knight-tournament (Kåreland and Werkmäster, 1994). The brave "knight" Knyttet is still depicted small compared to the huge rock like figure of Mårnan. However, he appears very changed, as Nikolajeva and Scott writes, "... his fierce posture and angry face differ radically from the character presented in the beginning" (Nikolajeva and Scott (2001).

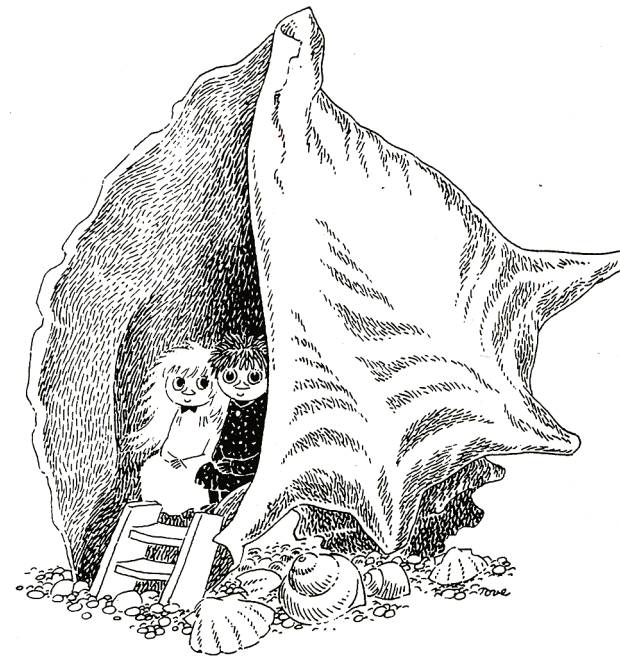
Even though the scene is full of dark drama, it seems at the same time to make a parody of a classic heroic battle. Kåreland and Werkmäster write, that Mårnan, who here has the role of the evil fairy tale troll or dragon, has more of a surprised and perplexed look than evil and hostile (Kåreland and Werkmäster, 1994). And furthermore, Knyttet is not being a very honorable hero by biting Mårnan's tail. I agree with Kåreland and Werkmäster when they claim that "Att bita henne i svansen är i sanning ett slag under bältet", "*To bite her in the tail is truly a blow below the belt*" (Kåreland and Werkmäster, 1994)

Knyttet also appears drastically changed, in the twelfth, following spread. The mere size of Knyttet and his beloved Skruttet points to a change – they have grown, suddenly depicted huge (picture 20). They both look happy, though shy. They are not facing each other and Knyttet seems to be blushing – his whole face coloured. According to Kåreland and Werkmäster, it is the innocence of young love that is described in both picture and text (Kåreland and Werkmäster, 1994). The romance and happiness of the picture is visualised by the couple standing in the middle of a meadow, full of flowers, and the mood is enhanced by the bright, light colours. Kåreland and Werkmäster point out that the general mood is in complete contrast to the previous spread, the battle with Mårnan, where darkness dominated (Kåreland and Werkmäster, 1994). Knyttet has been able to overcome his biggest fears and is now standing tall, surrounded by lightness. However, the verbal text still confirms his timidity, Knyttet feels weak in his legs, lost in shyness and unable to speak.

The thirteenth spread depicts Knyttet and Skruttet in the very middle of a colourful, spectacular, and festive end scene (picture 21). They are now centre of attention, sitting like a wedding couple in a boat dressed with flowers. All around them are creatures and figures, placed in boats or on rocks, playing instruments, shooting fireworks and waving to the couple. They are all there to celebrate Knyttet and Skruttet, and Knyttet is seen for the first time with a smile on his lips.

After the grandiose end scene, there is still one last picture. It shows Knyttet and Skruttet sitting in the opening of their new dwelling – a big white sea

Picture 20: from *Vem ska trösta knyttet?* (1969, 2001).Picture 21: from *Vem ska trösta knyttet?* (1969, 2001).



*... och sen
levde de lyckliga
i alla sina dagar...*

Picture 22: from *Vem ska trösta knyttet?* (1969, 2001).

shell (picture 22). When compared to the first picture, depicting Knyttet in his previous home, the mood is now very different. Even though, the same technique is used in both pictures, black line drawings, they still depict different atmospheres. In the latter, the picture is free from background (no frame) and the lines are less dark and intense – giving a much lighter feeling to the image. While the previous home interior felt closed in and threatening, the new home in contrast seems to give the impression of freedom, calmness and air. Knyttet no longer looks frightened and he is no longer crouched down with scared eyes. Instead, he sits relaxed next Skruttet, and they are both viewing the reader. Everything appears to have calmed down in Knyttet's world and he seems to be in peace.

Knyttet – a fairy tale hero?

Tove Jansson's Knyttet is at a first glance an almost perfect fairy tale hero. Knyttet leaves home for adventure (although not so willingly, rather he flees from his home out of pure fear). He faces many obstacles on the way and eventually is given the mission of saving a girl/princess from the claws of a frightening monster/dragon. Knyttet manages to fight the monster, win the day, get the girl and live happily ever after.⁹ However, Knyttet's personality and character is far from that of classic fairy tale hero. There is one similarity, though. According to Nikolajeva, fairy tale heroes often grow from being weak to strong (Nikolajeva, 2001). Knyttet grows stronger emotionally when he finds out about the existence of Skruttet.

Nevertheless, according to Nikolajeva, one of the fairy tale heroes basic features are a complete absence of complexity and nuances in the character description. She writes, that the fairy tale protagonists are almost never personalised, their traits, if they have any, are quite standard e.g. brave, clever or beautiful. Nor do they ever show any weaknesses – no doubt, fear, hopeless-

⁹ Many of these components follow, what Vladimir Propp describes as the structure of fairy tales (or folk tales, the terms are discussed interchangeably in the critical literature that I have read. As I understand, folk tales can refer to the term fairy tales and vice versa). According to Vladimir Propp, there are at least thirty-one components or functions in a fairy tale, the crucial ones being: the hero's departure from home to take on a difficult task, problems on the way, assisting helpers on the way, magical assistance, and the ending where the hero meets the villain in a battle – that the hero wins and thereby fulfills his task (Propp, 1968).

ness or desperation (Nikolajeva, 2001). And one cannot accuse fairy tale heroes of being contemplating, pondering characters, they are forward thinking and action oriented, according to Kåreland (Kåreland, 2013). The fact that fairy tale characters fundamentally are one-dimensional has been viewed as particularly appropriate for children, within, the earlier mentioned, point of view that the more simplistically a character is portrayed, the easier it will be for a child to be able to mentally grasp and identify with the character (see Bettelheim, 1979).

Knytttet, on the other hand, is without a doubt a contemplating character and full of “weaknesses”. In my opinion, he is loneliness and fear personified. Knytttet is a bundle of nerves and his emotions take him up and down on a roller-coaster ride in the story. Even when he starts to grow, when he gains confidence – gets stronger and braver emotionally – it does not last for long. His confidence is so brittle, that it immediately shatters to pieces when hears the frightening cries of Mårran. And as mentioned above, in the battle with Mårran he is not exactly behaving very heroically, when he uses the cheap trick of biting Mårran in the tail to win. Probably he does not see any other way out. More-over, immediately after his moment of glory, after he has defeated Mårran and stands face to face with his dream-girl Skruttet, his nerves gets the better of him once again. He turns so shy, that no words can pass his lips. Knytttet is such a bundle of nerves, that he does not even manage to compose a letter to her. The reader has to help him compose the letter instead. It is after the help and assistance of the reader, that Knytttet and Skruttet can fall in each others arms and live happily after. I believe they are each other's saviours, neither of them would manage the world alone especially well. This does not mean, that I think they now will share a sort of double isolation – retreating to old habits of solitude. Clearly, both of them have gained confidence – no longer as afraid to join and interact with others – but they have not changed their innermost personality. Both are still sensitive and vulnerable characters.

In my opinion, the fragility of Knytttet is one of the strongest reasons for what makes him such a memorable character – he is so very human. That even when he succeeds gloriously, he still continues to struggle with his confidence. He is who he is. Knytttet's inner personality does not change dramatically because he has conquered Mårran. He still is a character that continues to stumble and fall – just like most of us, children and adult alike. Knytttet is frail and – the reader knows – he will always stay frail.

The inspiration for Knytttet – the real life knytt

Perhaps the reason why Tove Jansson was able to create such a, in my opinion, psychologically credible character, is that she did not have to search very far for inspiration. Tove already knew him. The person, who helped inspire her to write the story about Knytttet, was a young boy who wrote to her. According to Christina Björk, the boy was calling himself Knytttet and described himself being one of the small knytt's, that sometimes hesitantly show themselves under a rock or bush – that are sitting there, trying to build up the courage to join in with others, but always fail to do so (Björk 2003). The two started to exchange letters, and in one letter Tove writes something quite interesting to Knytttet (Björk 2003):

“Ett knytt, förstår du, är benämningen på det jag representerade hela min barndom och ungdom; någonting som inte riktigt passade in i tillvaron, som alltid stod en bit ifrån och tittade på. En som visserligen var personlig och intensiv men aldrig vågade visa, utan skrämdes undan och gick vilse i missförstånd.”

“A knytt, you understand, is the name of what I represented all through my childhood and youth; something that did not really fit into existence, that always was standing a bit on the side, watching. Someone who certainly had personality and intensity but never dared to show it, that instead was scared off and got lost in misunderstandings.” Passage from one of Tove Jansson's letters, from the book, *Tove Jansson – mycket mer än Mumin* (2003).

So, not only was there a “real life,” Knytttet, that was Tove's friend and inspiration. In fact, Knytttet was also a self-portrait. Tove Jansson knew Knytttet already intimately – she was once a shy outsider herself. No wonder that Knytttet became such a credible, delicately drawn figure.

The power of Knytttet

As mentioned earlier, the book about Knytttet is one of Tove Jansson's most beloved stories – loved equally by both children and adults (Westin, 2007). And why it is so beloved, has its reasons. With the character Knytttet, Tove Jansson is able to illustrate the theme of loneliness – and how to overcome it – with such compassionate care that I believe we all get affected. Westin writes that, “Med

Vem ska trösta knyttet? berättade Tove om det djupa behovet av samhörighet som finns inom oss alla, förmedlat genom ett knytt och ett skrutt”, *”With Vem ska trösta knyttet? Tove told about the deep need of belonging that exists within us all, conveyed through a knytt and a skrutt”* (Westin, 2007). And furthermore she cites Bo Strömsted, who stated, that it is hard to imagine anyone that this book is not meant for (From an article by Bo Strömsted, *“Hur många tröstar knyttet?”* in the magazine *Expressen*, 1961, as cited by Westin, 2007).

Just how Tove Jansson manages so elaborately to depict Knyttet’s journey out of loneliness and seclusion – in the text, but more importantly in the pictures – overwhelms me personally. His portrayal is remarkable. The reader is able to empathise all the way with him, in all of his loneliness and his struggles towards happiness and belonging. And moreover, as I mentioned earlier, even though Knyttet changes from a scared and lonely character to one who finds courage and belonging, some of his permanent traits does not change. When it is all said and done, he is still shy and frail. That makes him yet more powerful and great as a character, in my opinion – because he is human.

To illustrate the power of the character Knyttet, I have a strong childhood memory that always comes to mind when thinking about him. As a child he was one of my absolute favourite characters and probably the one I identified strongest with. Not that I was a particular shy or fearful as a child, quite the opposite. The realisation that I “was” Knyttet, came the day when I moved out from my parent’s bedroom and into my own (I was around five or six years at the time). That day, after nightfall, everything changed for me, all things around suddenly turned frightening. The dark shadows in the room you could not count on, even the flowers on the wallpaper seemed to come alive in an unsettling way. I knew and understood Knyttet so well at that point – he became my comfort – that I was not alone in this horrific situation. We shared the fear, and both of us had tactics to make it through the night. He used to turn on all the lights before crawling deep under his blanket – hiding all through the night. My own, much smarter tactic, I thought, was to first arrange all the teddy bears in a ring around me as defending soldiers before taking refuge under the blanket.

Still, I feel related to Knyttet, he still comforts me. And I cannot imagine I am the only one. In the words of Boel Westin, “Alla rädda, osäkra och skruttiga har sin like i det ensamma knytt som ändå småningom möter sin skrutt ...”, *“Everyone who is afraid, uncertain and frail has their counterpart in the knytt that anyway eventually meets his skrutt”* (Westin, 2007).



Comparing Pippi and Knyttet

Pippi and Knyttet do not at a first glance seem to have very much in common as children's book characters. Perhaps not even at second or even third inspection. Though, when you look hard and close enough, you see their shared weakness. Pippi and Knyttet have the same struggle with loneliness in common. But they have other things in common as well, in their personality and in their construction as children's book characters.

The shared loneliness

The characters Pippi and Knyttet seem very different. Knyttet is a fearful and melancholic character, he is shy and still. Actually, in the visual depiction, he is quite literally still (paradoxically, since he is embarking on a journey). He sits or stands still in almost all pictures, except in the scene where he is fighting Mårran, and in the scene where he is walking out into the sea collecting the bottle containing Skruttet's letter (Kåreland and Werkmäster, 1994). And then we have Pippi, is there a more fearless, happy-go-lucky and confident children's book character? Her lively spirit makes her the absolute contrast to Knyttet's huddled stillness. Her liveliness is depicted consistently, not only throughout the written text, but also in the illustrations – with arms and legs seen flailing and a happy grin on her face.

It is easy to presume that these two characters have absolutely nothing in common. And, I have to confess, in the beginning it seemed impossible to find any similar qualities in their character portrayals, except for the evident fact, that they both are charismatic and memorable figures. The first thought was, that they were depicted in a radically different manner. Especially when it came to the depth of their portrayal. Knyttet's portrayal is, in my opinion, so unique and profound in the way that Tove Jansson visualises his vulnerability and angst. This an amazing endeavour, when one considers, that the format is a picture book with only thirteen spreads and quite limited space for text (that

is in verse). Initially I did not see the same profoundness in the depiction of Pippi. I thought that her charisma and uniqueness must lie elsewhere. That her special looks and quirky, outrageous and rebellious traits, for example, had been enough to attain her world fame and glory. Her charisma seemed unquestionable, but at the same time she appeared quite shallow. My perception was that Pippi's confident strength dominated fully both her written and visual depiction – by having her possess only good and strong qualities, with no flaws or apparent conflicting traits. By comparison, the initial conclusion was, that there was not much nuance to Pippi when contrasting her to the emotionally dramatic Knyttet.

Of course, I took into account already from the start, that one commonality between Pippi and Knyttet, is the fact that they are alone in the world, without any family around. However, I did not comprehend the relevance since they seemed to handle it so very differently. In *Vem ska trösta knyttet?*, it is abundantly clear that Knyttet needs comforting and the safety of company (already the title informs us of that). Pippi on the other hand, seems to be in no need of comforting or protecting, she appears to do very fine on her own.

It was first when coming across Charlotta Ödman's book, *Snälla vilda barn – Om barnen i Astrid Lindgrens böcker* (2007), that a moment of enlightenment struck. In this book, as already presented, Ödman convincingly argues and demonstrates in her narrative analysis, not only the idea that Pippi is depicted as a quite normal child – and not an unreal, utopian figure – but also that she is in fact a very lonely and sensitive child. Pippi is trying to cope as best she can, while keeping a brave facade (Ödman, 2007).

Ödman writes, for instance, that Pippi's loneliness seemingly keeps being confirmed and re-established – whenever she tries to escape it, she is thrown right back into it – and it happens through the many disastrous encounters Pippi has with the adult world. Often enough, according to Ödman, these confrontations are met by Pippi's amusing and ironic repertoire. However, there are scenes where Pippi's good intentions are misunderstood and her sensitivity is visualised (Ödman, 2007). As an example, Ödman brings up the episode where Pippi makes a spectacle at Tommy and Annika's mother's, Mrs Settergren's, coffee party. When Mrs Settergren makes it clear to Pippi that she has misbehaved and is never to come back, she reacts with sadness and dejection:

“Pippi såg förvånat på henne, och långsamt fylldes hennes ögon med tårar. Det var väl det jag kunde tro, sa hon, att jag inte kunde uppföra mig! Det är

inte lönt att försöka, jag kan i alla fall aldrig lära mig det. Jag skulle ha stannat kvar på sjön.”

“Pippi looked surprised at her, and slowly her eyes started to fill with tears. That was what I thought, she said, that I could not behave! There is no point in trying, I can anyway never learn to do it. I should have stayed at the sea.”

Mrs Settergren does not mean to, but she has with her harsh words thrown Pippi right back into loneliness, according to Ödman (Ödman, 2007). Within this context, it is also interesting to note, that Pippi is very nervous about the coffee party. The prospect of attending the party seems daunting to her. When she gets the invitation from Tommy and Annika she reacts with the words:

– O, hur ska det gå! Oj, vad jag blir nervös! Tänk om jag inte kan uppföra mig!
– O, how shall it go! Oh, how I do get nervous! What if I cannot behave myself!

Furthermore, when she arrives to the party she does so by loudly giving herself military orders, while claiming that:

– Jag är nämligen rätt blyg av mig, så att om jag inte tar det med kommando, så skulle jag bara stå i tamburen och trilskas och inte våga gå in.
– I am actually pretty shy, so if I do not command myself, I would just be standing in the hallway fussing and not daring to go in.

Pippi's reaction in this circumstance is quite baffling. It is not what one is lead to believe about her ability to deal with any given situation – that she becomes shy and afraid by the mere thought of attending a social event. What happened with her unfaltering confidence?

Actually, Pippi's reaction is not miles away from Knyttet's shyness and inability to interact with others. Of course, Knyttet's social phobia is undoubtedly more severe, since Pippi at least makes the effort of trying – she is not hiding in any bushes. However, both seem to react strongly when faced with the daunting prospect of a social situation. Knyttet shrinks and hides – trying his very best to be invisible. Pippi, on the other hand, does the complete opposite, she bombastically goes overboard in her attempts to be sociable. Her nerves seem to take the better of her when she is trying her best to fit in – when she takes centre stage and rambles on while making scene after scene. Actually, both characters seem to prefer to be outsiders, since both of them seem to be afraid

of what would happen, if they dared to join in with others. Sadly for Pippi, her fears have just cause: Even with all her good intentions and efforts, she fails when attempting to fit in. In this way, the depiction of Pippi's loneliness is not just about being a parentless child. As Ödman states, the loneliness is not only constructed through the absence of family, but also in the way that Pippi fails to meet the expectations of those around her – expectations that she cannot live up to since it is not in her nature. All her good will, when it comes to the adult world, seems to be unnoticeable for them and she keeps on getting rejected (Ödman, 2007).

Another moment of clarity, concerning Pippi's loneliness and fears, emerged when reading Jørgen Gaare and Øystein Sjaastad's psychological analysis of Pippi's struggle with sadness and angst. For example, their theory about Pippi's up-side-down sleeping arrangement was illuminating. As mentioned earlier, Gaare and Sjaastad point out, that sleeping with your head under the blanket can be seen as a sign of angst, as well as a need to protect oneself from the threat the outside world holds (Gaare and Sjaastad, 2002). Accordingly, one could assume that Pippi actually handles the nights with just as much difficulty as Knyttet. That they both feel threatened by the scary world outside – trying to cope with nightly horrors under the blanket.

Ödman's research, together with Gaare and Sjaastad's analysis, opened my eyes to the undertone of sensitivity in Pippi's character. I realised, that one has to read the trilogy with a certain sensibility, keeping close watch to what is said between the lines. For example, the implicit truths, or, that what Pippi says is opposite to what she actually feels. When one attempts that, suddenly all sorts of questions arise. For instance, you start wondering why is it important for Pippi to hold on to the ridiculously oversized shoes, that her father once gave her – the text emphasising that she never wanted to wear any other pair – even though she gets teased and questioned for them, not to mention the impracticality of them? Or, for that matter, why a girl, who has everything, or at least can afford to get anything, gets so overly happy for a small present? When Tommy and Annika go to Pippi's birthday party, they give her a musical box. Pippi gets so overjoyed by the present, that she goes wild with delight and starts patting both of the children, the musical box and the wrapping paper. Then she plays with the box – completely mesmerised. Could this be because she treasures the moments when others notice her needs to be seen and taken care of?

Furthermore, it is pointed out in the text that “Ingen kunde se så sorgsen ut som Pippi, när hon var ledsen”, “*No one can look as sorrowful as Pippi, when*

she was sad”. Why is that? One explanation is that she is faking. According to Ödman, among the commentaries on Pippi, there are interpretations that suggest, that Pippi's sadness and remorsefulness can be seen as acting or clowning about (Ödman, 2007). For example, Edström writes, that one can never know when Pippi is *playing* submissive (Edström, 1992). Perhaps it is so, but could it not as well be because she actually is a very sensitive child. When she is hurt, maybe the strongest girl does become the saddest girl in the world?

The more one examines the text, the more sensitive and lonely Pippi appears. Her situation seems to continually resemble Knyttet's situation. Both have a hard time coping, but they try the best they can. For example, according to Gaare and Sjaastad, “När Pippi är ensam, måste hon underhålla sig själv med sjömanshistorier som helt klart är rena självbedrägeriet med syftet att muntra upp henne”, “*When Pippi is alone, she has to keep herself entertained by sailor stories that are obviously pure self-deception with the purpose of cheering herself up*” (Gaare and Sjaastad, 2002). Furthermore, coming back to their mutual troublesome nights, in the evening before going into hiding under the blanket, Knyttet sits curled up with all the lights on, in the vain attempt to get comforted and keep the fears away. Pippi on the other hand, stays up all night long playing ball – perhaps keeping herself occupied from unwanted thoughts? Moreover, Pippi appears to have the need to be comforted like a small child at bedtime, she has to sing lullabies to herself to fall asleep. At one point she even asks Tommy and Annika to tuck her in!

To sum up, Knyttet and Pippi share the same basic problem of loneliness. In a sense, the only difference lies in the way they are dealing with their shared problem, and in the way it is expressed to the reader. Pippi is adamant about keeping her loneliness hidden and under control, even to herself. To quote Ödman, “Följer man ensamhetstemat framträder en gestalt som håller masken och tillmötesgående försöker anpassa sig, en som skiljer sig från de sorgsna känslorna, sitt äkta jag, för att klara av sin situation”, “*If one follows the theme of loneliness a gestalt appears that keeps her mask on and complaisantly tries to adjust, someone who separates herself from the sad feeling, her true self, in order to manage her situation*”. So it is Pippi's mask or facade that differs her from Knyttet. Knyttet cannot be accused of keeping any of his sad or negative feelings under lid. His emotions are boiling over to the degree that he is forced to fight his way out of loneliness or else he will perish. The panic and despair is out in the open for anyone to see. Pippi keeps it all hidden, even for herself, and even for the reader.

As discussed above and in the individual analysis of Pippi, the depiction of loneliness is subtly described – an almost invisible theme. While in Knyttet's case, the loneliness is outspoken, being the main motif. Paradoxically, Knyttet actually appears stronger than Pippi in this context. He openly dares to wear his weaknesses on his sleeve, while Pippi denies and hides hers. Another paradox is that the comical Pippi trilogy becomes a sadder read than *Vem ska trösta knyttet?*, when one considers, that Knyttet finds his way out of loneliness, while Pippi stays stuck in hers. The contrasting end scene images speak volumes. While Knyttet, in his newly found bliss, is seen sitting together with Skruttet in their seashell house, Pippi sits alone and melancholic at her kitchen table staring dreamily into a candle light.

The character construction and revelation of Knyttet and Pippi

An interesting concept model for analysing and discussing character design/ construction and character revelation in children's books is presented in Maria Nikolajeva's book, *Aesthetic Approaches to Children's Literature* (2005). The model places characters into the categories of Static and Dynamic, Flat and Round. According to Nikolajeva, static characters do not change in a story. While, on the other hand, dynamic characters do – they change throughout the story. Round or multidimensional characters can be seen as fully developed characters. Nikolajeva writes, that they have many different traits that are both positive and negative. The reader can really get to know these characters during the story, but not predict their behaviour. Nikolajeva continues, that on the contrary, flat characters are not multidimensional or fully developed, fundamentally they are two-dimensional. She points out that a typical example is the classical fairy tale heroes. As mentioned above, these characters are most often possessing one typical trait, for example good or evil, and the reader has no difficulty in foreseeing their behaviour (Nikolajeva, 2005).

Nikolajeva has interestingly enough used the character Pippi as an example of a round, although static character. She writes that Pippi is "... undoubtedly a round character, with many exciting traits, but she is static and does not change (Nikolajeva, 2005). I agree with Nikolajeva on both points. Pippi is clearly a very round, fully developed character. She possesses many traits, and has, as we have seen, different sides to her personality. On the positive note, she has almost exhaustedly many great traits. She is confident, witty, assertive and kind, the list can go on and on. However, within her character one can also

find weaknesses such as the loneliness, but also shyness and self-doubt. Actually, one can even find in Pippi some bad, or at least less charming, traits, for example being a bit of a bully. For instance, in one episode Pippi is both mean and argumentative to a girl that happens to pass by Pippi's house in search of her father. The less than kind Pippi is even at one point threatening to hit the baffled innocent girl. Furthermore, as a fully developed, round character, any prediction of Pippi's behaviour seems absolutely impossible. However, Pippi is a static figure. When one compares her to Knyttet, who goes through quite major changes – from the loneliest, shyest most fearful to the point of feeling belonged and brave – Pippi seems to stand still. She is basically the same throughout all three books.

Is Knyttet then both dynamic and round character? Is he as multidimensional as Pippi? One can wonder if the reader is able to get to know Knyttet especially well, because of the limitations of the picture book format. Compared to the sheer volume of text in the Pippi trilogy, the reader would be bound to get to know Pippi better. The energetic Pippi is also speaking herself (or yelling) non-stop through the trilogy, while poor Knyttet is basically mute. He only has three speaking lines in the book, and they are all delivered during his search for Skruttet. Prior, when he is at his shyest, he utters only noises, whining, whimpering and sighing (Kåreland and Werkmäster, 1994).

On the other hand, the reader does not get to know anything about Pippi's inner thoughts and feelings. Those we can only figure out by her actions/ reactions or reading between the lines. Her loneliness, for example, is only revealed through her reactions in specific situations and her excessive denial of the loneliness itself. In *Vem ska trösta knyttet?*, the reader surely learns about Knyttet by the text describing his feelings and struggles. However, it is more the sensitive visual depiction that allows the reader to get to know him. The small figure himself with his expressive eyes, the composition, the mood and the landscapes – they all help to form the portrayal of Knyttet. As mentioned earlier, the reader is never explicitly told by the text that Knyttet is looking for company, one only gets to understand that by Knyttet himself in the images (Kåreland and Werkmäster, 1994). It is in his expressive longing looks as he watches other's togetherness that makes that fact evident.

Furthermore, Ulla Rhedin (while discussing the horizontal image composition in *Den farliga resan*), brings up that the landscapes, with their different compositional emphasis of seclusion, entrapment, desolation, etc., can be seen as reflecting the courses of events – psychologically – within the protago-

nist (Rhedin, 1992). I believe that the landscapes serve the same function in *Vem ska trösta knyttet?*. For example, when Knyttet escapes his home in panic, the landscape of overwhelmingly tall dark trees surrounding the tiny figure, visualises the panic state, littleness and vulnerability of Knyttet.¹⁰ In contrast, the picture in which Knyttet has found his beach and the sea, the landscape represents something very different – it depicts newly found peace and serenity. Furthermore, according to Kåreland and Werkmäster, it signals hopefulness as well as a promise of new tempting future prospects. They state that the sea – as a universal symbol for the origin of life and life's opportunities – can be seen as indicating the new life path that Knyttet is about to embark on (Kåreland and Werkmäster, 1994).

The visual portrayal of Pippi is not nearly as comprehensive and profoundly deep as Knyttet's. But then again, the trilogy about Pippi is not intended as a psychological drama, focused on dealing with her personal problems and/or depicting her inner growth. Basically, it is a comic story, focused on the freedom of play and fantasy. The text prioritises describing Pippi's exciting traits and lively nature, and the pictures reflect the same. Only in the picture where Pippi is seen crying, does the picture contrast the written text of Pippi's denial, showing her true emotional state. Perhaps this is the major difference between these two characters. Their stories are based on very different themes: the motif of journey out of loneliness versus the motif of freedom of play. However, as we have seen, the comedy of Pippi does not exclude tragedy. The tragic aspect – the downside of freedom – is an inherent part of the story, it is just not the main theme.

Even though Knyttet and Pippi's stories have different themes, the goals of the stories are perhaps not so different from each other. In a way, both stories are depicting the importance of gaining the courage to express oneself and take a place in the world – whomever you are – so you can be free to live. Astrid Lindgren chose a skinny but super strong, strange looking little girl as her hero. A character that, like Ödman writes, can show children how free they really are, even though the adult world is trying its best to oppress them (Ödman, 2007). Tove Jansson, on the other, chose a tiny frighten troll as her unlikely hero. She used a weak and timid character to visualise the possibility for all to become, not only someone else's hero and saviour, but also their own.

¹⁰ Westin writes, that the forest is a classic milieu of adventure, as well as a metaphor for feelings of angst (*Vår moderna bilderbok*, Westin, 1991).

As mentioned earlier, Knyttet can be seen as a dynamic character, while Pippi cannot. Instead she is seen as a static figure – a character that stays the same throughout the story. When contemplating this notion from the perspective of their mutual struggle with loneliness, I wonder if there is perhaps not a psychological explanation for the staticness of Pippi versus the dynamism of Knyttet. As discussed earlier, Gaare and Sjaastad believe that the theory of the reactions of the abandoned lonely child can be applied to the character of Pippi. They claim, that Pippi is realistically depicted when she uses coping strategies, as for example, being overly optimistic and omnipotent as she is forced to take over the adult role, or clowning around to keep angst and sadness away (Gaare and Sjaastad, 2002). So in a manner of speaking, Pippi is trying very hard to cope with the cards she has been dealt in life – and she manages to do so quite effectively. Knyttet on the other hand, cannot stand the fate he is given. He is simply not able to cope with his loneliness anymore. He needs to go through change, and embark on a journey for his very survival. In other words, Pippi is static because she does not anymore have to, or want to, change. She has already learned to cope with life and does so more or less successfully, depending whom you ask. Knyttet's dynamic features, on the other hand, can be explained by the urgency of his situation.

Knyttet and Pippi's common projects

Kåreland and Werkmäster write in their narrative analysis of *Vem ska trösta knyttet?*, that Knyttet has two projects to fulfill in the story. The mission of saving and comforting Skruttet is, what Kåreland and Werkmäster call, project number two, which is a part of his project number one – to get free from fear and loneliness (Kåreland and Werkmäster, 1994). (Project, of course, is another way of describing the motifs of the story.)

I believe Pippi has quite similar projects on her agenda (perhaps not her main objectives, but still). She is also fighting hard to keep or get away from her feelings of loneliness. And she does so by keeping herself very busy socially with not a minute to spare for any sadness. For example, for her best friends, Tommy and Annika, Pippi is a “... lekledare, en outtröttlig organisatör av utflykter och äventyr. Med mottot att utmana allt som förträkar och försnävar livet”, “... *play-master, a untiring organiser of excursions and adventure. With the motto of challenging anything that makes life boring and constricted*” (Edström, 2004). And, while she is teasingly “dancing” around the adult authorities, getting their full attention, she also manages to keep court with all the chil-

dren of the small town. She is their undisputed queen and their entertainer. Knyttet wants nothing more than to be a part of group – Pippi has determinedly acquired the centre stage of a whole community.

Furthermore, both Pippi and Knyttet seem to have the need to take care of someone else to feel purposeful and happy. When Knyttet comes across his second project, the mission of saving Skruttet, he manages to forget and set aside his own problems because of Skruttet's needs. Altruism helps him. Kåreland and Werkmäster write, that the feeling of being needed gives him strength and a purpose in life. That "Paradoxalt nog blir han därigenom själv tröstad. Han får styrka, när han går utanför sig själv och engagerar sig i andras öden. Därmed glömmar han sina egna bekymmer", "*Paradoxically, as a result he himself gets comforted. He gets strength, when he forgets himself and engages in other people's destinies. Thereby he forgets his own troubles*" (Kåreland and Werkmäster, 1994).

I believe that this is something that Pippi is already practicing in her attentiveness and care towards others. She too gets comforted by helping others. Her tenderly attentiveness concerning Tommy and Annika exceeds the duties of a friend and resembles more motherly, parental love and attention. Edström writes, "Som en barnjungfru à la Mary Poppins vakar hon över sina vänner och skrämmer dem i lagom doser för att liva upp utflykterna. I söderhavsäventyrets tredje del rycker hon i sista stund undan Tommy från en hungrig haj – och gråter efteråt av sinnesrörelsen. Ingen kan vara ömmare mot hennes barn än Pippi, intygar fru Settergren, barnens mamma", "*Like a nanny à la Mary Poppins she guards over her friends, scaring them in moderate doses to lively up the excursions. In the South Pacific adventure's third part, she manages in the last minute to pull Tommy away from a hungry shark – crying afterwards out of emotion. No one can be more tender towards her children than Pippi, declares Mrs Settergren, the children's mother*" (Edström, 1992). Also, according to Ulla Lundqvist, during the same South Pacific adventure, Pippi becomes all children's natural protector and comfort at the island Kurrekurreduttön. During night it is Pippi's presence that comforts the children. Tommy and Annika sleep closest to Pippi, holding her hand (Lundqvist, 1979). Not only does Pippi act as Tommy and Annika's guardian protector, she also tends to other needs to make them happy. She is feeding them, giving presents and fixing Christmas for them etc. Moreover, she is even sacrificing her own happiness for them. She cannot bear to see their pain, as she is about to leave with her father to Kurrekurreduttön (where she would become a princess), so she decides to stay while stating:

– Jag står inte ut med, att någon människa på Guds gröna jord gråter och är ledsen för min skull.
– *I cannot stand, that any person on God's green earth cries and is sad for my sake.*

In a way Knyttet acts in a similar manner in the scene where he hears the terrible cries of Mårran. In that moment Knyttet wants nothing more than to hide and escape, but he does not, because of the thought of Skruttet and her well-being. Of course, in this case he is not sacrificing his happiness literally (since he does not yet have any to give up), but he is willing to give up his happiness in the sense of security and safety for Skruttet's sake, because he cannot stand that there is someone more afraid than him.

Breaking gender norms

When it comes to the topic of gender, there is reason to compare Knyttet and Pippi. Tove Jansson and Astrid Lindgren both seem to have enjoyed playing with traditional gender roles with their respective characters. Both Knyttet and Pippi break the gender stereotypes quite drastically.

With the character Knyttet, Kåreland and Werkmäster write, that Tove Jansson plays with the traditional idea of the strong man, that is supposed to conquer and comfort the weak woman, that is often depicted in trivial literature. And that the love story of Knyttet and Skruttet is of similar character to this genre, but starring a very different male hero. According to Kåreland and Werkmäster, the weak and powerless Knyttet cannot be accused by any means of living up to the conventional male hero ideal. They state, that he is, at least in the beginning, more of an antihero. Anxiety and fear describes him rather than courage and the ability to take action. Furthermore, he breaks the common male ideal by openly showing his weaknesses (Kåreland and Werkmäster, 1994).

Pippi cannot either be accused of being stereotypically depicted as a little girl. Not only is she the world's strongest girl, she is probably the most confident and independent one as well. In Edströms words, "Framför allt har Pippi forcerat genusbarriären när hon har slagits med en boxare i San Fransisco, rensat en sjömanskrog i Santiago, tampats med en boaorm i Indien", "*Foremost has Pippi broken down the gender barrier by fighting with a boxer in San Francisco, cleared out a sailor bar in Santiago, battled a boa constrictor in India*" (Edström, 2007). However, it is important to point out, that she is not just a girl acting

like a stereotypical boy – what Nikolajeva calls gender permutation, a “hero in drag” (Nikolajeva, 2005). According to Edström, Pippi is a child of nature, who sets all conventions and traditions out of place (Edström, 2007). I agree, Pippi is in this sense androgynous in the word's true meaning – no social conventions or rules apply to her personality. Pippi is such an original, that no stereotypical label can be attached to her.

Knyttet's and Pippi's respective appearances also break the norms. Kåreland and Werkmäster write, that Knyttet's masculinity in the pictures is vaguely drawn, for example, the long dark coat he is wearing could just as well be a woman's coat, his high heel shoes similarly look like they are of feminine model and his bag, with a huge embroidered rose application, looks unusually feminine. Furthermore, according to Kåreland and Werkmäster, he is also depicted quite feminine in his gestures. For example, they bring up the scene, where he is wading out to the sea to pick up the bottle, he holds his dress-like shirt like an anxious little old lady. Actually they state, that it is foremost the use of the pronominal “he” in the text by which the reader is allowed to get a clear understanding about the gender of Knyttet (Kåreland and Werkmäster, 1994). Interestingly enough, Tove Jansson was, according to Boel Westin, first considering a female knytt, that was called Knyttan, although during the process of work with the text the figure changed gender. Tove Jansson decided to continue with what is the most recognizable theme: a man that saves a woman (Westin, 2007).

When it comes to Pippi's appearance, there is nothing conventional about it. According to Edström, Astrid Lindgren used the Pippi character as she was reckoning with the conventional girl myth – the old demand of girls to please and subordinate themselves (Edström, 2004). And there is nothing pleasing about Pippi, either in her personality or looks. For example, even if her looks do not stand up to any beauty norms, she is completely satisfied with herself, according to Edström. She writes, that Pippi loves her own red hair and freckles, being the counterpart to, for example, Anne in *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), who hates her red hair intensely. In older literature, Edström explains, that girls, like Anne, often had a difficult task of controlling and mending their shortcomings and restraining any broad gestures. Pippi does the complete opposite: she allows herself to indulge in exaggeration and asserts herself in all circumstances (Edström, 2004). In the images, I believe, this is exactly what Vang Nyman has succeeded visualising in her portrayal of Pippi – the lively unbridled exaggeration and Pippi's self-admiration.

Both Pippi and Knyttet are depicted not only breaking the traditional gender stereotypes, but more importantly, they are both depicted so originally, that their respective genders feel obsolete. In my opinion this makes it possible for everyone to emphasise and identify with them.

Why Pippi and Knyttet are memorable characters

To sum up Knyttet and Pippi share the same universal problem of dealing with loneliness, and actually they share similar ways of coping with their mutual problem in life. For example, in the way they cope with their troublesome nights, or how they both are comforted by altruism. And, interestingly enough, Knyttet is not the only one dealing with shyness and confidence issues. Pippi shares his problem at times when she tries to fit in socially.

What comes to construction, Knyttet and Pippi can both be called round, fully developed characters. They both have many different traits, that can be considered both good and bad, or perhaps in their case, weak and strong. Knyttet is a fearful and shy figure, but within he also possesses such a trait as bravery (to everyone's surprise, perhaps, most of all to himself). Pippi is strong and confident, but also self-doubting.

In my opinion, all of the above make them great and powerful characters, like their many traits, their weaknesses and how they cope with them. Their individual multidimensionality makes them unique characters. Which perhaps would be a sufficient answer to the research question – what makes a character memorable? Yet, there is more to it. In my opinion, the most important part with their portrayals is that they appear coherent or whole, in the sense that they feel believable as unique individuals. However, it is hard to explain and understand the specifics of why Knyttet and Pippi seem coherent as characters. Is it only the unique combination of traits or is it something more?

In my opinion it is something more. I believe that the coherency somehow lies in the carefully assembled personality traits together with the expressed behaviours (as actions and reactions in specific situations), that are both unpredictable and consistent. To clarify, as round characters, Pippi's and Knyttet's behaviour cannot be predicted. However, at the same time, they behave consistently as the individuals they are.

To give an example, when it comes to Knyttet, I believe that the most important detail in his depiction is his consistent fragility. Even when Knyttet goes through changes, the frailty – like his shyness – stays with him because it is an

innate part of him. That is his personal vulnerable point and it does not magically disappear because he fights the “dragon” and wins his “princess”. The fact that Knyttet stays frail throughout his story makes him appear whole in my opinion – since some parts of us never change.

When it comes to Pippi, it is in fact her loneliness that, in my opinion, makes her appear whole and human. It is surely the part of her that she does not like herself – her vulnerable point. And it is the side of her that she cannot get rid of. Even though she is as anarchistic, tough and strong as can be, and no matter how unpredictably she behaves, that part of her is still there like an unchanged backdrop. And her actions and reactions are, as we have seen, consistent with that, for example in her coping strategies. Her loneliness is very subtly described, but it is there. And it flows like and undercurrent throughout the story. It even ends the story. Almost like a statement that even the strongest girl in the world has her problems, and she is not able to handle or fix them all – she is just like us.

In view of the above, both Knyttet and Pippi then appear the most consistent in their portrayals when it comes to their weaknesses. So, within their unique assortment of traits, it is their innate vulnerable sides that make them coherent. This becomes the psychological dimension that explains the reason why they behave like they do. This notion brings a quote by Giorgis et al. to mind, “Often it is in the way the author portrays the vulnerability or uniqueness of the character so that he or she lingers long after the story concludes” (Giorgis et al. 2000).

What in effect the coherency or wholeness of these two characters mean, is that it makes them become something more to us than just a collection of traits. They become more than the sum of their parts. They are now believable individuals in their own right. That means, that if we want to, we can understand them. We can get to know, empathise and get close to them. And when you are allowed to get close to someone, you remember him/her. Knyttet and Pippi are unforgettable characters, because we have gotten to know them and they have become dear to us.

Another effect is that, since we can see them for who they are, they also become important for who they are. They are no longer just agents or actors playing out a plot. If we care for them, they have become significant beyond their stories. For me this notion does not mean that the characters have then taken over and become more important than their stories. Rather it means that the characterisation has deepened the meaning of their stories.



Conclusion

This thesis set out to answer “What makes a children’s book character memorable”?

One cannot argue with the fact, that Astrid Lindgren and Tove Jansson have used quite different approaches when creating their respective children’s book stories. They have different formats and means of storytelling, different genres and different themes. However, as found out – with the critical help of previous research – through the individual and comparing analyses of the works, the two very different stories have one crucial thing in common. They both have profound character portrayals.

Both Pippi and Knyttet are multidimensional, fully developed characters – being in possession of many carefully assembled and distinct personality traits. However, they are not just only a collection of traits. They appear coherent or whole because of their unpredictable, yet consistent personas. In this sense, they have become unique personalities, believable individuals in their own right.

I claim that a character has to be multidimensional, coherent and believable in order to become memorable. Because it is only then, that the reader truly has the chance to get to know, identify, empathise and, importantly, to get close to a character. The effect of being able to understand and get close to characters is that the characters in turn become important for whom they are. They appear as having an independent existence, apart from their own stories. This I believe adds to the memorability and quality of the story itself.

Some might of course argue, that different stories serve different purposes. Like, for example, straightforward adventure and plot-oriented stories might seem to have very little need for deeper characterisation. Nevertheless, my argument is, that even if a story is action based, effort and thought given to the personality of a character is beneficial to the story’s quality.

The Pippi trilogy, for example, consists basically of fun, exciting and adventurous episodes. However, considerable thought has been placed on the pro-

tagonist's personality. What would the adventure episodes have been without the character Pippi as we now know her? Without her many different features, her kindness contrasting with her sass or her toughness combined with her sensitivity? What if she was just a sassy, argumentative tomboy? I believe that the reader would then be inclined to feel a distance to her, and neither the stories nor Pippi would have been so embraced by the public.

Interesting to note is that, according to Ulla Lundqvist, the somewhat melancholic and lonely side to Pippi is not present at all in the original story. She continues stating that, "Den medkänsla som Pippi väcker är ny och har den dubbla funktionen att beveka de stora och röra de små", "*The compassion that Pippi evokes is new and has the double function of softening the adults and touching the children*" (Lundqvist, 1979). The fact that Astrid Lindgren added these qualities to Pippi in the revised manuscript, makes me believe that she understood and appreciated the need of character nuance. It was not enough to have an anarchistic little übermensch as her protagonist, she needed more diverse qualities to her character – she needed the vulnerable point of her loneliness.

Furthermore, since many of Pippi's features are implicit, it also means that much of the information about her is optional. While reading, one can choose to discover the aspects of her character or just be amused by all the fun. Pippi's psychological dimensions never overshadow the humour or adventurousness of the trilogy, they just strengthen to the overall artistic quality and profoundness of the work.

As a final note, when contemplating Pippi and Knyttet it seems like an insurmountable task to be able to create and achieve as memorable characters them – these kind of characters do not come around often. However, they truly are something to get inspired by for all authors and illustrators of children's books.



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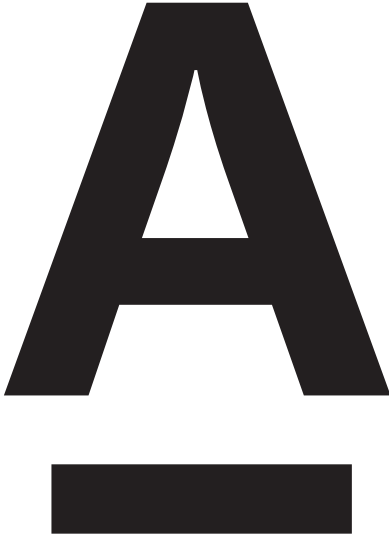
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Appendix

Designing a character for a picture book – a practical study

To discuss the topic of characterisation on a more practical level, I have included this part where I present the process of developing my own children’s book character. I have included here the story synopsis, storyboard and sketches of the picture book I am currently working on. I have also added five further developed illustrations to give an idea of the visual style of the book under way.

My dream has been for years to create a children’s picture book, and in this project I want to take what I have learned about characterisation into practice. As explained in the introduction, my first attempt of making a picture book did not work out, because I had not paid enough attention to the characters. Therefore I decided to start the whole process by developing one protagonist character and concentrating thoroughly on characterisation, before getting too involved in a fixed story or plot. My goal is to create a fully developed and coherent character, an individual that has a unique personality, problems and a background story.

The characterisation process

It all started with nothing, and nothing lasted for a long time. However, eventually it clicked and the idea of a character started to take form; the idea of a girl who does not like dogs. Why she has such an aversion, I had no idea yet – I just followed the thought.

I started sketching this girl, and in the first sketches I saw a glimpse of her persona. In the sketches she naturally took a quite defiant position, looking very determined (picture 1). The hair became a messy dark mop, and she was wearing a top and pair of thick green unflattering ribbed stockings, that were hanging down, looking as they were to big for her. Somehow she was already there, the visual sight of her gave her a character – a bossy, determined



Picture 1: sketch – the little girl.

little girl, that would not let anyone tell her what to wear, or come near her hair with a brush.

The next step became to visualise her room. I thought it would be a good way of getting to know her, to see what her toys and play would reveal. So I started sketching and it never seemed to end. The room interior became messier everyday and kept filling up with more and more toys, all sorts of toys interacting with each other in small play-scenes (picture 2). When the room filled up completely, I started drawing her toys on separate sheets (picture 3). And in the end the toys and her room actually told me more about her. That her room is her private haven and that the toys are her intimate friends, perhaps her closest friends. She is a child that prefers to play alone – by her own fantasy rules. Moreover, the toys explained to me why she dislikes dogs. Most of them being wild animals – bears and penguins seemed like favourites. She likes wild animals because of their independence, dogs or domesticated animals she has no respect for, because they are too needy.

At this point I started writing the first synopsis for the story. I placed the starting scene in the little girl's room in the morning together with her mother. In their discussion, the mother becomes submissive (picture 4). The roles turn and the daughter starts behaving more parent-like than the mother. With this notion, the first idea of a story plot came to be; an upside-down parent-child relationship (involving a dog). In this plot, the parents are the ones nagging the child for a puppy and the child is the one trying to reason how much work a puppy would be. The parents keep promising to take responsibility, while the child knows it won't be so. Unsurprisingly, the child ends up giving in to the parents wish and buying them a puppy.

However, I decided that the upside-down roles would play out in the child's fantasy. That the parents are in fact normal, behaving as responsible as any good parents. It was the little girl's opinion of the family roles that would be depicted, because she somehow felt frustrated with her parents. Feeling that she was not being heard and that they were not really to be counted on – forcing her to be more independent, or grown-up than she wished for.

The reason, why she felt like this, was hidden, until I began sketching on a kitchen scene, where the girl imagines the messes of the puppy, and how much cleaning she would have to do. In all the mess on the floor, I included a baby sitting, playing – another messy, needy creature in the little girl's opinion (picture 5). That was the reason the girl felt unheard, because no one had asked for her opinion when acquiring a baby. And now she was equally upset



Picture 2: sketch – room interior.



Picture 3: sketch – toys.



Picture 4: sketch – mother and girl.



Picture 5: sketch – kitchen scene.

about buying a puppy, another decision taken over her head. Furthermore, she felt that the puppy was clearly a bribe for now caring more about the baby than her – an attempt to buy her off with another unwelcome house guest. So from being the only child of devoted parents, she now feel unjustly treated and neglected. With this notion, I wrote a summary of the first synopsis that goes as follows:

A little girl gets the news that her parents are thinking about buying a puppy. The child gets tremendously upset by this news for two reasons, for one, she hates dogs, and secondly, she cannot take it when her parents make decisions that affect her, but that she has no control over. The news of a probable puppy in the home causes the young girl's imagination to go into a spin. In her mind, she cannot see any other prospect than that she would be the primary caretaker of the puppy. Since she does not believe her parents would be able to handle the responsibility. The distrust she feels towards her parents, stems from that a little brother came along about half a year ago. This betrayal made her feel so replaced and insignificant that it was not to be tolerated. As a protection for future disappointments she has become a very autonomous little girl. The little girl's fantasies revolve around all the icky and heavy chores she has to take on concerning the puppy: cleaning after poop and pee, taking on all the dog-walks, day and night. And even though she has bluntly said no to a puppy, her parents keep harassing her about it. At Christmas, for example, they are so disappointed that they did not get a puppy for a present, that it is almost unbearable to look at their sad, droopy faces. Eventually, the little girl decides that she has to get them a dog, to end the nagging, sad looks that are driving her mad. And actually it will not be so difficult to find one, since she has contacts – she knows a guy, that knows a guy... She picks a puppy somewhere at the countryside. When she brings it home, her parents are ridiculously overjoyed, and surprisingly enough, she feels kind of proud of herself. But of course, she was right, all the responsibility ended up on her. However, she does not mind so much, since the dog seems to be quite good company.

Now I thought I had a more or less story ready, and began making a storyboard and sketches for the illustrations. However, when I took a step back and contemplated on the newly created storyboard, I realised that the story was too simple. It felt too straightforward and repetitive – almost all scenes taking



Picture 6: storyboard 1.

place at home in various interiors, picturing the whiny, flimsy parents and the stubborn child (picture 6).

The little girl had to get out of there – somehow she had to leave home, and so she did. In her fantasy, of being the primary puppy caretaker, she goes for a forest walk with the puppy one late snowy evening, and there in the middle of the forest she suddenly meets a group of wild animals. The group consists of a recently woken-up bear, a wolf and a fox have. The little girl, who likes all wildlife, does not get afraid, instead she happily greets them and soon enough they are all friends (except the for the poor puppy, who gets ignored by everyone). The animals and the girl come up with idea of joining together for some adventure (picture 7).

The idea of this episode started a revised story. That, instead of staying at home, in combat with her parents, the girl leaves them behind. The girl, the animals and the puppy embark on a journey that takes them far away for a long time. The story now became more about play-imagination than just imagined reality. And I rewrote the synopsis as follows:

A little girl, approximately six years old, gets told by her mother that they are getting a dog – a puppy. The news anger the girl. She does not like dogs, and what is more, she knows very well that her ridiculously flimsy parents will not be able to take care of any puppy – they do not even have time for her. She will be the one having to be responsible for the dog. And so it happens, when the dog arrives, the little girl finds herself being the one who has to clean up the dog's messes, and in the very late evening, and early morning, she is the one taking the dog for walks. So life continues, until one cold winter's evening, when the girl and the dog are walking through the forest. Suddenly they are surrounded by wild animals – a big bear, a wolf and a fox lure behind the trees, watching them intensely. But these particular animals are not angry, nor hungry for little girls or dogs. No, they are simply bored, looking for company. For example the bear woke up from his hibernation so very restless, that he simply could not fall back to sleep. The three animals and the little girl – who is also bored and fed up with her many chores – decide to embark together on a journey. No one bothers asking the dog, he is just forced to tag along. The group starts their long journey, climbing mountains and crossing rivers. In the rivers they fish for supper and they all cuddle up at night to sleep in comfort. After many weeks the group reaches the ocean and starts sailing south. Everyone agrees that some warmth would be nice after the past cold weeks of walking. Eventually they reach a jun-



Picture 7: sketch – meeting in the forest.

gle. It is a hot, dense, dangerous and exiting place. The girl must have a spear at hand at all times, and all the animals are bit nervous and uncomfortable with the new surroundings. But, eventually they all get used to the ways of the jungle and start relaxing and having fun. One day they have so much fun swimming in the river, that they do not notice the many crocodiles luring. Suddenly, they are all under attack and have to flee up a big tree. There they find themselves stuck, the hungry crocodiles are patiently waiting. But all of a sudden the puppy, out of everyone, builds up the courage to save the day. He starts barking loudly and running so fast that the crocodiles, all excited, start following him. Meanwhile, the rest of the group climbs down from the tree and gets to safety. And eventually, the puppy joins them, gaining a new respect from them all. After this hardship the decision is made that the time has come to leave the jungle and go home. The animals miss the forest and the little girl actually misses home and her parents. When they reach home, the little girl's parents jubilate their return. Even though the parent's seem a bit nervous around her new friends, they listen interested to the all the stories from the journey. (See storyboard, picture 8)

I realised that the girl has three motifs for her fantasy journey. First of all she gets to escape her frustrating reality for a great adventure. Secondly, she gets to leave her parents behind – a sort of punishment for not caring enough about her. Thirdly, by coming back home, to her now worried parents, she gets to enjoy their happiness of getting her back. And, importantly, their full attention. Actually, there is even a fourth benefit – the dog, who now has become a reliable friend (and who perhaps is real after all). With this synopsis, the story started to take form. The main motif or theme for the story became to be about relieving frustration and worries with play and fantasy.

In retrospect, I have realised, that the story is in some ways similar to one of my favourite children's books, Astrid Lindgren's, *Allrakäraste syster* (...). The similarity is in the way that both stories are about taking refuge to fantasy when not being seen or heard. In *Allrakäraste syster* the main character is a girl named Barbro who feels unloved by her parents because of her little brother. To escape her reality, she has invented a twin sister who, amazingly enough, has managed to run and hide behind the rosebushes in the garden immediately after birth. The sister Ylva-li is now ruling an enchanted underworld where Barbro escapes to. There the sisters play in magical surroundings and have each a horse and dog (Barbro's biggest dream is to have a dog). After a wonderful day Ylva-li tells her sister something worrying, that when the roses above

in the garden withers she will be dead. When Barbro returns home that day, she is greeted by her mother, who has been worried sick for her. Barbro then realises that her parents love her. And what is more, her parents have a surprise for her – a real life puppy, that in Barbro's opinion, seems somehow more real than the dog she has in the underworld. The next morning, when Barbro goes out in the garden, the roses have wilted.

Allrakäraste syster is somehow so poetic and bitter at the same time. The wonders of imagination and play coexist with frustration and anger of not being seen. As a child I remember feeling an overwhelming empathy and identification with Barbro. I believe almost all children would. In my memory, the feeling of not being acknowledged is a recurring part of being a child. I believe, that it is childhood memories like these, that naturally become the subconscious material for children's stories. We write about what we know.

In retrospect, I have also realised that I have used myself as a basis in the character depiction. Funnily enough, during the process you are not aware, that what you are creating is more or less a self portrait. There is a memory behind almost all features of my character. For example, I hated any form of hairstyling and preferred to play alone. I remember the frustration with friends when they played "wrong". And I also had a toy-world, where every toy had a personality and were involved in ongoing dramas around my room. And moreover, my solitary fantasies of sailing across the sea, or fighting through dense jungles, could go on for days.

Maybe it is quite self-absorbed getting inspired by yourself, or casting a version of yourself as a main character in a fiction. Though, perhaps this it the way it easily goes – we tell what we know. Even the best of the best seemed to have done just that. Astrid Lindgren writes that "... det finns inget annat barn som kan inspirera mig än det barn som jag själv var en gång. Det är inte alls nödvändigt att man har egna barn för att skriva barnböcker. Man måste bara ha varit barn en gång – och så komma ihåg ungefär hur det var", "... *there is no other child that can inspire me than the child I once was. It is not all necessary to have children of your own to write children's books. One just have to have been one once – and remember approximately how it was*" (*En bok om Astrid Lindgren*, Lindgren, 1977).

And in an article in the magazine *Horisont* (nr 2/1961) Tove Jansson to the point describes the selfish reasoning behind creating children's books, "... Överallt sitter en till synes oskyldig barnboksförfattare och försöker gömma sina innersta motiv. Men när man tittar närmare på honom är han inte

alls så oskyldig", "... *Everywhere there sits a ... innocent children's book writer trying to hide his inner motives. But when one takes a closer look at him he is not all that innocent*" (Jansson, 1961, as quoted by Björk, 2003). She continues that one has to presume that he writes out of desire, but not to amuse or educate, but for his own childishness. That is half lost or difficultly fitted into the adult world – in sense a form of escapism (Jansson, 1961, as cited by Björk, 2003).

The process, of developing a character and a story, has been both challenging and rewarding. It has not been a very straightforward process, jumbled and conflicting thoughts and ideas have been difficult to get in order. However, at the same time it has been interesting and rewarding to create a character that you, along the way, get to know and actually feel that you have a relationship with – the little girl has become important to me.

She has helped me understand the children's book author Katherine Paterson's answer to the question: "How do you build your characters?". Her answer is, "I'm tempted to remind them that characters are people, not models you put together with an erector set, You don't "build" people, you get to know them" (Paterson, 1989, as quoted by Giorgis et al., 2000).

Picture 8: Storyboard 2.



Picture 9: Morning walk.



Picture 10: Meeting in the forest.



Picture 11: Beginning the journey.



Picture 12: Sailing.



Picture 13: In the jungle.



Picture 14: In the jungle, in colour.



